

Breaking Through the Portal by GreenLily474

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Summary: AU: On November 10, 1983, Will Byers was able to break through the portal with the help of Eleven. He escapes the Upside Down a couple days early. The Party members are overjoyed to have their friend back, but they face a whole new set of challenges to keep Will and Eleven safe from monsters and bad people

1. Chapter 1

Chapter One

AN: this is a story that popped into my head. It's AU to the show and somewhat AU to my others fics, though everything thing that happened in the first prologue of MKUltra Ripple also is part of the back story to this fic, as are the twists in that story.

"Mom, please!" Will said desperately as he pushed on the portal. Eleven continued to focus really hard as she watched him. She wanted to help him because he was Mike's friend and because he was trapped and frightened. She understood that all too well.

"No, no, listen. I will find you, but you have to run. *Run!*" said Joyce.

Will turned and ran. He tripped and fell near the spot where Eleven was standing. She saw the Demogorgan creeping toward him. It usually rapidly leapt at it's victims. Eleven couldn't let it get Will. She focused all her strength on throwing the monster back away from him. Her scream attracted Will's attention. He looked up and their eyes met for a brief moment.

Eleven vanished from Will's sight. She woke up briefly in the A.V. room with his three best friends. She saw Mike standing in front of her then passed out.

Will stared at the spot where the girl vanished. He looked back at the vanishing portal on the side of the evil dimension version of his house. He was so close. He wasn't sure how long he'd been in the cold dark place, but he didn't want to be there any longer. He was so close and he had to try.

Will ran back to the portal and pushed with every ounce of strength he had. He felt some sort of current running through his body and into the thinning portal. On the other side, Joyce dropped the ax she was carrying as she saw Will's hand breaking through the membrane. She ran over and began to pull it apart. Will looked over and saw the monster starting to move.

"Mom, help! It's waking up!" Will looked over to the spot where he'd seen the girl standing. He didn't want to leave her in the dark place, but she was nowhere to be found.

"Will, reach as far as you can!" said Joyce. Her voice was much more clear to Will now that nothing was separating them. He jumped into the portal breathing clean air for the first time in days. Joyce grabbed him under his arms and pulled him the rest of the way through, both of them fell onto the floor.

Joyce held her son tightly in her arms, fearing he might disappear if she let go. Will sobbed with relief into his mother's shoulder as she rocked him and caressed his hair. Will looked over to see the claw of the monster pushing through the portal. "Mom! It's coming through!"

Without a moment's hesitation Joyce jumped to her feet and grabbed the ax. She swung it as hard as she could at the monster. "Stay-the-hell-away-from-my-son!" Joyce shouted as she swung the ax at the wall. Chester ran in front of Will and growled at the monster. The monster seemed able to dodge each blow. Will saw his mother's cigarette lighter sitting on the kitchen table. He grabbed a towel and tied it in a knot, then grabbed the lighter.

"Mom, stand back!" Will shouted. Joyce looked confused, but complied. Will lit the towel on fire and threw it through the portal at the monster. It writhed about in pain, then charged at the portal. Will backed up several steps and Joyce swung the ax several more times as the portal vanished and left a hole in the wall with sunlight streaming into the living room. Will fell to his knees panting.

"There was a girl in there, Mom," said Will. "She helped me escape, we have to help her."

Joyce set the ax down and glanced at the hole in the wall. She wasn't sure how she'd get the money to fix it, but didn't particularly care at that moment. The wall meant nothing to her compared to her children and a hole in the wall was a very small price to pay to get Will home.

"Will, honey, are you hurt?" asked Joyce as she kneeled next to her younger son. She wondered where Jonathan was and if he was okay

at that moment. He'd be overjoyed to see his little brother home and safe. "Your nose is bleeding. Did you get hit in the face with something?"

Will wiped his nose and looked at the blood on his hands. He shook his head. "I don't remember. But the girl-I don't want anyone to be in that place."

"We'll figure something out. There's something very weird going on. That coroner wouldn't allow me or Jonathan in the room to see that thing they said was your body and he tried to make me sign the death certificate when that thing didn't have your birthmark," Joyce pushed up Will's sleeve and caresses the birthmark on his arm. "Why wasn't Gary doing the autopsy and why did they have guards at the door..."

"Mom?"

"We have to keep you hidden, something's going on," said Joyce.

"Some people were trying to convince you I was dead," said Will as tears formed in his eyes. "I was afraid you were going to stop trying to find me."

"Never," said Joyce as she took Will's face in her hands. "I believed what I saw with my own eyes. Jonathan and Hopper both thought it was grief, but the state troopers were trying to convince me I was crazy-"

"Like dad always did," said Will.

"Something like that," said Joyce. She helped Will to his feet. "Let's get you cleaned up, this stuff can't be good for you. And I should probably burn these clothes." Joyce indicated Will's grime covered jacket vest,

"I don't think I ever want to wear these clothes again anyway," said Will.

Joyce grabbed some clean clothes from Will's room left them on the bathroom counter for him while he was in the shower. She grabbed his dirty clothes, took them outside and threw them in the tall metal

garbage can. She lit a match and tossed it in. She thought she heard some sort of scream as the flames rose in the air.

She decided to call the funeral home to see if Jonathan was there. The director told her that he'd left with Nancy Wheeler a couple hours earlier. Joyce had seen on the news that Barbara Holland was missing. What if her disappearance was connected to Will's? Nancy Wheeler wasn't the type of girl to skip school just to tell Jonathan she was sorry about Will's death.

Joyce called the police station, but Hopper wasn't there either. He was the only person in law enforcement she trusted enough to talk to about Will at the moment. She grabbed a can of soup and heated it up on the stove for Will.

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Eleven woke up on the sofa in Mike's basement. She didn't remember how she got there. "Mike!" she called weakly.

Mike was instantly at her side holding her hand. "It's okay, El. You're safe."

"Safe," said Eleven slowly. She wasn't sure if Will was safe. She closed her eyes to try to find him, but was too weak to focus. "Will, Will's mom. Demogorgan."

"Will said something was coming," said Dustin.

"We should check on Mrs. Byers," said Lucas.

"El, can you stand?" asked Mike. Eleven nodded. Maybe it would be easier to see Will if they were at his house.

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"Feeling any better, baby?" Joyce asked Will as he finished his soup. He was more thirsty than hungry.

"A lot better than I felt in the dark place," said Will with a small smile. Joyce felt his forehead and cheeks with the back of her hand. He felt cool and clammy.

"We need to get you warmed up," she said as she glanced at the hole in the wall. The tarp that was covering it suddenly seemed very inadequate. "You should get some sleep."

Will shook his head. "I don't want to sleep yet. I see that place every time I close my eyes."

"Let's at least get you over to the sofa and get some blankets for you."

"Okay," said Will. Joyce guided him to the sofa, covered him with several blankets and rocked him slowly as she held him in her arms.

"I'm so glad your home safe, Will. I'm going to do everything I can to keep you that way."

Chester put his head on Will's knee and Will smiled and scratched him behind his ears. Joyce tried to figure out what she was going to do in the next couple of days. There was a funeral for Will the next day and she knew that she had to pretend that he was dead because someone was trying to make the world believe that. Whoever it was had to be covering up some terrible secret and Will was still in danger from that person.

They were both startled by a persistent knocking at the door. "I'm going to get rid of whoever that is unless it's Hopper," said Joyce. "Stay out of sight, Will."

Will curled up on the sofa as Joyce went to answer the door.

"Mrs. Byers are you okay?" That was Mike. Will felt excitement welling in his chest. He had been afraid that he'd never see his friends again.

"Hey, Mike, Dustin, and Lucas. I'm fine," said Joyce. Dustin and Lucas were there too.

"What happened to your house? How did that hole get there?" asked Dustin.

"Don't worry about that," said Joyce. "I just need to be alone now, thanks for stopping by, guys."

"We know about the monster and we know Will's still alive," said Mike. "We want to help, Mrs. Byers. Please, let us help you save him."

"What?" asked Joyce. Will couldn't wait any longer. He threw off the blankets and ran toward the front door.

"Guys, I'm here!" Will called eagerly. Mike, Lucas, and Dustin looked past Joyce and saw their friend that had been missing for days, that they thought had been dead for a few terrible hours after seeing a body pulled from the lake.

"Holy Shit!" Dustin exclaimed. He was the first to break out of his stupor. He ran to Will and pulled him into a hug. "They pulled a body out of the lake last night. We thought you were dead."

Will quickly felt Mike and Lucas join in on the hug. Joyce noticed a young girl with blonde hair wearing a pink dress standing on the porch. She stepped out, gently put her hand on the girl's back and guided her inside. She looked around to make sure no one was watching before closing the door. Will recognized the girl as she stepped inside,

"Mom, it's her! She's the girl who helped me!"

"She helped you?" asked Lucas. "How?"

"The monster was chasing me and she stopped it," said Will. "It gave me the time I needed to crawl through the portal and get back home."

"From the place that was like home, but dark, cold and empty?" asked Mike.

"Yeah, it was like here, but everything was just dead and-"

"Upside Down," said Eleven.

"That sounds like a good word for it," said Will.

"You really were trying to help this whole time," said Lucas as he walked over to Eleven. "I'm sorry I doubted you and called you a weirdo."

"It's okay," said Eleven.

"Will, this is Eleven, but we call her El," said Mike. Will walked over to Eleven and held out his hand.

"Nice to meet you, El. Thanks for saving my life."

"Friends help each other," said Eleven.

"How did she do, whatever she did to that monster?" asked Joyce.

"She has super powers," said Dustin. "She made Troy pee himself today."

"What?" asked Will.

"He was trying to beat up Mike after Mike shoved him to the ground when he was talking shit about you," Dustin explained to Will. "It was all pretty badass. But we found her on Mirkwood when we were looking for you Monday night."

Joyce noticed the tattoo on Eleven's wrist. She remembered that Hopper had suspected Hawkins Lab in Will's disappearance and that witnesses had seen a kid about Will's age and height with a shaved head with Benny Hammond the day before he was found dead.

"Listen boys," said Joyce. "You can't tell anyone that Will's still alive. There's something going on that made people go to a lot of trouble to fake Will's death and we need to be very careful until we figure it out."

"That fake body has the exact same clothes Will was wearing when he left Mike's on Sunday night," said Lucas.

"The bad people, they did it," said Eleven.

"Oh, Jesus! What are we going to do?" asked Dustin.

"I'm waiting for Hopper to see what he knows," said Joyce. "But we need to keep Will hidden."

Eleven walked to the back door and stared out the window at the

shed. She remembered seeing tired marks out front that were much larger than the ones on Joyce's car.

"El, what is it?" asked Mike.

"They've been here, the bad men," said Eleven. She walked over to Will and grabbed his arm. "You're not safe here, Will. They'll find you. They'll hurt you." Eleven closed her eyes and started to cry. Will looked as though he'd received an electric shock. He leaned on the counter for support. "I'm sorry. I opened it, the gate," said Eleven.

Will shook his head. "No, they made you do it."

"The bad men?" asked Mike.

"Hawkins lab," said Will.

"How do you know?" asked Lucas.

"I don't know," said Will. "It's like I could see her memory."

"Oh, this is really bad," said Dustin. "It was bad enough that the bad people were after Eleven, but now they're after Will too?"

"They won't get their hands on either of them," said Mike. "Mrs. Byers, El's been hiding in my basement since Monday night. Will can hide there too. The bad people might find him if he stays here."

Joyce looked at Mike carefully. She didn't want to let Will out of her sight, but had to agree with Mike. She nodded.

"Here's the plan," said Mike. "Lucas, Dustin. Start heading home. Meet me at my house in an hour. Mrs. Byers, you can drive me home while Will and Eleven hide in the backseat. We can tell my mom that I went to your house to check on you and Will and Eleven can sneak in through the basement door while we're talking to my mom."

2. Chapter 2

Chapter Two

Will hid under a blanket in the back of his mother's car. He was huddled on the floor with a stranger-and yet, not so strange- girl sitting next to him. Eleven was watching him with an odd expression on her face. She reached over and squeezed his hand. In his mind, he saw an image of her laying on a hospital bed clutching a stuffed lion just like the one he had in Castle Byers. A man, that Eleven obviously feared entered the room. The image vanished and Will saw Eleven's eyes widen. He squeezed her hand back as he closed his eyes and thought of his own stuffed lion. When he opened his eyes again, Eleven was smiling. Will wasn't sure why they could see each other's memories, it must have been the Upside Down. He just knew he could understand her and she could understand him. She wanted to help him and he wanted to return the favor.

Mike and Joyce looked around carefully (Mike even ran around to the back of the house) once they got to the Wheeler home before they opened the back doors to let Eleven and Will out of the back seat. Mike pulled his house key out of his pocket and handed it to Will. "It should be unlocked, but just in case. Hurry!"

Will nodded as he took the key and Eleven followed him to the back of the house. Mike grabbed his bike from the truck and put it in the garage. as Joyce watched her son disappear with the girl who had saved his life. She wanted to hug him-hug both of them, but there wasn't time.

"Ready?" asked Mike.

"As ready as I'll ever be," said Joyce.

"I won't let anything happen to Will, Mrs. Byers, I promise," said Mike earnestly.

"I know you won't," said Joyce as she squeezed Mike's shoulder. She had no doubt that Mike would do everything he could to protect Will, but he was just a kid himself. "I just want this to be over with, and I

don't know who we can trust."

"Yeah, it sucks," said Mike as they walked up to the front door. They didn't have to put much effort into looking sad. The thought of Will and the girl who had helped him still being in danger didn't exactly make Joyce happy.

"Michael! Where have you been?" asked Karen as she ran from the kitchen.

"Sorry, Karen. I should have called," said Joyce. "He came to see how I was doing. We started talking about Will and time just got away from us."

Karen sighed pulled Mike into a hug. "Why don't you come on in, Joyce? I'll make you some tea."

"Thank you, " said Joyce.

"Mike, are you hungry?" asked Karen.

"I'm fine, Mom," said Mike. "Is it alright is Dustin and Lucas come over. We just want to be together."

"Yes, of course," said Karen. Mike headed to the basement as Karen lead Joyce to the table and put the kettle on the stove. Joyce wanted to follow Mike to the basement and check on her son. It had only been a couple minute since she'd watched Will disappear behind the house, but that was too long. She felt herself starting to cry and wiped her eyes. Karen squeezed her hand.

"I wish I could wave a magic wand and bring Will back," said Karen. "But if there's anything I can do, I'm here for you."

"Thank you, Karen," said Joyce absently. Her mind was in half a dozen other places at that moment. "Is Nancy home, by any chance? I haven't heard from Jonathan since we left the coroner's this morning. When I called the funeral home, they said he left with Nancy."

Karen's brow furrowed. Mike and Will had always been as close as two children could be, but Nancy and Jonathan as never actually been friends. They'd been perfectly polite to each other, but they only

ever interacted because their younger brothers were friends. "Nancy was upset about Barb missing earlier. She kept saying that something had happened and no one would listen..."

"Jonathan can be a good listener," said Joyce. Her suspicions were confirmed. Whatever had kidnapped Will must have taken Barb as well. She had to get to the bottom of it if Will was going to remain safe. "I have to go."

"Why don't you stay for dinner?" Karen offered. "You shouldn't be alone and Nancy should be home soon. Maybe Jonathan will be with her."

"Thanks for the offer, Karen. There are just some things I need to take care of. Do you mind if I talk to Mike before I leave?"

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Will sat on the couch tapping his foot nervously. The elation of escaping the Upside Down and seeing his mother and friends again was wearing off and being replaced by disquieting thoughts. He wondered what he was going to do. The demogorgan was still loose and could still take people. It spent a lot of time around his house. Will worried about his mother, his brother, and his dog. He wondered if he was putting the entire Wheeler family in danger by staying at Mike's house. He worried about Eleven and the fact that mad scientists were after her.

"Will!" said Mike ask he broke Will from his thoughts. "Are you okay?"

Will shrugged and made a motion with his head that was somewhere between a nod and a head shake. "I don't know... just a lot on my mind."

"That's understandable," said Mike as he sat down next to Will. Eleven sat on the other side of Will. "Like what?"

"Just trying to figure out what's going on," said Will. Eleven pulled off the blonde wig and and scratched her head. It was starting to get itchy and scratchy. She tried to put it back on, but couldn't get it to

fit just right. "If it's not comfortable, you don't need to put it back on. We're inside," Will told her.

"Yeah, you don't need it," said Mike.

"Still pretty?" asked Eleven.

"Yeah, really pretty," said Mike earnestly. Will stared at his hands. He felt like he was in the middle of a private moment between Mike and Eleven. Mike started to blush as he realized what he'd said. He was glad that it was Will in the room as Dustin and Lucas would have teased him mercilessly.

"They hurt her," said Will as he decided to break the tension.

"Who, El?" asked Mike.

"Yeah, some mad scientist at Hawkins Lab tried to make her into a weapon. He locked her in a closet when she wouldn't do things like kill a cat. We can't let them find her, Mike."

Mike looked at Will in disbelief, then looked past him at Eleven who was fidgeting with his grandmother's wig. "Is that true, El?"

"Yes," said Eleven in a barely audible voice.

Mike closed his eyes and shook his head. "That's why you didn't want to hide in the closet two days ago. I'm so sorry, El."

"It's okay, Mike."

"How did you know that, Will?" asked Mike.

"I don't know," said Will. "I saw things when I was at my house and she did... whatever. It reminded me of nightmares I had when I was little."

"You broke your finger when you fell off your bike, Will," said Eleven.

"How did you know about that?" asked Will. "That was over a year ago."

"Dustin talked about it this morning," said Mike.

"I saw it when it happened," said Eleven.

"What?" asked Mike and Will in unison. Eleven stood up. She grabbed one of Mike's Hot Wheels, then made a ramp out of the D and D board. She demonstrated the car going up the ramp, then turning on it's side. Mike and Will exchanged a puzzled looks.

"Okay, Dustin didn't talk about the how," said Mike. His eyes widened and he started to pace back and forth. "El recognized you from the science fair picture. I thought it was because she'd seen you on Mirkwood or something... But what if, what if the demogorgan was specifically after you."

"What do you mean?" asked Will.

"Your mom said the lights flickered when it was around. The porch light flickered just as you were leaving Sunday night. What if that was the demogorgan."

"Yes," said Eleven quietly. "I saw."

Will started to breath very quickly. "I can't stay here. It'll put your family in danger."

"No," said Eleven. "It's safe here."

"Are you sure?" Will asked her.

"Yes, I'm sure," Eleven answered with certainty as Joyce came down the stairs. Will ran over to her and hugged her.

"Mom, you can't stay at the house. You have to take Jonathan and Chester somewhere. The demogorgan will be back. It's not safe," said Will.

"We'll be fine. That thing has been in the house at least twice this week and hasn't touched Chester; and now I know how to fight it if it comes back thanks to your quick thinking this afternoon." Joyce reluctantly let go of Will and walked over to Eleven. She took the young girl's hands in her own. "I'm not sure what you did to help my

son escape, but it was very brave."

"I-I wanted to help," said Eleven.

"You were very helpful and I don't know if I can ever repay you, but I'm going to try," said Joyce. "I'm going to get some help exposing that lab and making sure you're safe from those people. They won't get their hands on you or my son. I'm going to do everything in my power to stop them."

"Thank you," said Eleven. She hugged Joyce. She had seen Will hug her, so figured that she should as well. Joyce was a little surprised at first, but returned the hug. The poor girl had likely never been hugged at the lab.

"Mike," said Joyce over Eleven's shoulder. "Thank you for protecting Will. Apparently your sister went to see Jonathan at the funeral home today. If he stops by, let him know that Will is here. He'll be glad to see his brother alive and well."

"I will and thanks for helping, Mrs. Byers. I'm not sure anyone else will believe us."

"I think Hopper will if I can ever find him," said Joyce. She walked over and pulled Will into one last hug before leaving. It was harder to let her precious little boy who had been missing for several days go, but she made herself do it. She knew he wouldn't be safe at home.

"Where are Dustin and Lucas?" asked Will. "They should be here by now. Did they take Mirkwood?"

"I'll find out," said Mike. He grabbed his supercom. "Lucas? Dustin? Do you copy?"

"We copy," Lucas's voice responded. "Just picking up for Wizard supplies for our campaign tonight."

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Joyce worked on cleaning up her house. It was the only thing that could distract her as she waiting to hear from Hopper or Jonathan. She had taken down some of her Christmas lights to check the bulbs

for bugs and put them back up when she finished, deciding it was a good warning system.

A couple hours after sunset, she saw headlights through the window and hoped it was Jonathan. Unfortunately, it was Lonnie. She wanted to scream at him to leave. He hadn't even returned her calls when Will went missing. What business did he have there? What kind of father was he? He had never cared about Will or Jonathan.

"Jesus, what happened here?" asked Lonnie as he noticed the hole on the side of the house. Joyce decided to play the part of the grieving mother. It wasn't hard since she already had anxiety from bringing Will home alive, only to have to hide him from some strange monster and evil scientists. There was also the fact that she hadn't heard from Jonathan or Hopper. Joyce leaned against the door frame as tears leaked from her eyes. She put her face in her hands and soon felt Lonnie's hand on her shoulder. He was putting on a show and she knew it. She didn't trust him and needed to figure out a way to get rid of him.

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Joyce slapped Lonnie's hand away. "Why are you here?"

"Joyce, there's a funeral for our little boy tomorrow, I'm here to help," said Lonnie.

"Help?" asked Joyce. "You couldn't even bother to return my phone calls when Will went missing and now you want to help?"

"Oh course I want to help," said Lonnie. Joyce leaned against the door frame and covered her face with her hands. Maybe Lonnie was really mourning Will, but every instinct in her told her that she couldn't trust him with the truth. He wasn't even apologizing for not returning the calls. She started to cry as she thought of Will being in danger-Will and the little girl from the lab.

"C'mon, babe," said Lonnie as he took Joyce's arm and led her inside. "You look like you've been through hell." Lonnie was carrying a bottle of vodka. He grabbed a couple of glasses from the kitchen on their way to the couch.

"What happened to the wall?" asked Lonnie.

"I'm probably just losing my damn mind," said Joyce.

"I can fix it tomorrow after the funeral," said Lonnie. "I could fix up a few things around here over the next few days. I'm here as long as you need me."

Joyce eyed him skeptically, but gave a silent nod. "Take the couch," she said. Memories flooded her mind of all the times Lonnie had degraded Will and Jonathan. She couldn't recall him ever telling either of them that he loved them. Joyce had always been very proud of Jonathan's photography talent and Will's drawing talent. Lonnie had always called both things a waste of time. Joyce had no intention of letting him sleep in Will's room.

"Here, have some of this, it'll calm your nerves," said Lonnie as he

poured some vodka.

"I'm fine," said Joyce as she held up her hand. She didn't want to risk getting drunk and telling Lonnie something that could put Will or Eleven at risk.

"You're completely frazzled," said Lonnie as he pushed the drink into her hand. Joyce held the glass to her lips and looked away as she pretended to take a sip. Just then, Jonathan walked into the front door. His face was full of concern as he noticed the hole in the wall.

"Mom, what happened here?" he asked. He noticed Lonnie and glared. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to help for a few days," said Lonnie. Joyce got up and hugged her older son.

"I'm so sorry about our fight earlier. Are you alright? I called the funeral home and they said you'd left with Nancy Wheeler?"

"We were just developing some pictures in the photo lab and talking about Will and Barb. Are you okay, mom? Did that thing come back?"

"Jonathan, that's enough!" said Lonnie.

"I've been under a lot of stress this week, honey," said Joyce as she gave Jonathan a meaningful look that Lonnie couldn't see. She knew she wanted to get rid of Lonnie, but had to find the right opportunity to do so without arousing suspicion.

Jonathan eyed the Vodka on the coffee table and scowled at his father. "Can we talk?" he asked Lonnie. "Alone?"

Joyce heard her older son and ex-husband arguing in Jonathan's room. She grabbed the bottle of Vodka and dumped it into the sink. She figured she'd simply tell Lonnie that she didn't want to be hung over at her son's funeral. Chester whimpered as he sat next to her. She scratched behind his ear. "He'll be home soon, boy," Joyce whispered to the dog. She started to feel very worried that she hadn't heard from Hopper.

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Eleven didn't know most of the words she needed to tell people the things she needed to tell them. Somehow, Will could see her memories and thoughts. He understood her better than anyone, even Mike. She knew that Mike was right when he said that the demogorgan had been after Will. She wasn't sure how she knew, but she just knew. The demogorgan had killed everyone else that it took-almost instantly. But Will had survived somehow.

Despite starving for nearly four days, Will barley touched the food that Dustin and Lucas brought for him and Eleven. He was thirsty, but not particularly hungry. Eleven could tell that he was feeling sad and scared. It was exactly how she had felt the first night she spent in Mike's basement during the storm. She remembered laying alone in the pillow fort as the storm raged on outside. She was partially upset at seeing Benny killed earlier that day and seeing the demogorgan kill so many people the night before when she had escaped. She had also seen Will in the Upside Down, huddling in a small space hoping the demogorgan wouldn't find him, just had she was huddling in the pillow fort hoping that the bad people would find her.

"Sorry I'm not very good company right now," said Will to Eleven as they sat in the basement while their friends were upstairs having dinner.

"It' okay, Will. I understand," said Eleven.

"I just...I want to go home and I can't," said Will as he wiped his eyes. "And I feel so, so drained. I was in that place for almost four days and didn't feel drained until jut before I got out. It's weird. I'm happy to be back in our world, but I'm really tired and the same time and don't want to go to sleep."

"I-I don't think I have a home," said Eleven. Will looked at her sympathetically and squeezed her hand.

"I think you will when this-whatever this is-is over," said Will. "Maybe you can stay here with Mike's family or maybe stay with my family. I know that my mom wants to take care of you and my brother is an awesome big brother. "

"Home," said Eleven with a serene smile.

Will brought his knees up to his chin and wrapped his arms around his legs as his friends came down from dinner. He stared at nothing as Mike, Lucas, and Dustin discussed what they would do next.

"Will, are you okay?" asked Mike as he brought Will out of his trance.

"Huh?" asked Will as four faces watched him with concern. "I mean, yeah, I'm fine...Just feel kinda out of it."

"That's understandable, you've had a very weird week," said Dustin.

"We were just talking about expanding that pillow fort so you can sleep in it tonight, just in case my parents come down or something," said Mike.

"Oh, okay," said Will.

"Sorry, it's not the greatest sleeping arrangement," said Mike. Will shrugged.

"It's better than sleeping around all the rotting slime in the Upside Down,"

"Are you gonna be alright tomorrow, you know, while we're at your..." Lucas asked.

"I'm not in the Upside Down anymore, so I'll be fine," said Will.

"What is going on here?" asked Nancy from the stairs, startling the four boys and Eleven. Nancy looked stunned at the sight of Will.

"Nancy, I-We-Uh," Mike stammered. Nancy held up her hand, put her finger to her lips, then ran to the top of the stairs and closed the basement door.

"Last night you came home crying because you thought Will was dead," Nancy said to Mike as she came back down the stairs.

"Yeah, I did think he was dead, but the body was a fake. Eleven proved he was alive. Y-you'd better sit down, Nancy. This is a very weird story," said Mike.

"I know," said Nancy. "I was just talking to Jonathan this afternoon about Barb and we thought maybe her disappearance was connected to Will's... That they both might be alive." Nancy slowly sat down, she was deep in thought, then she suddenly stood up, walked over to Will and knelt down next to him. "D-did you see Barb?"

Will shook his head. "I didn't see anyone else. I was just staying by my house when I was trapped there. I could sometimes hear my mom or Jonathan talking or I could communicate with my mom through the lights or make my cassette player work."

"What? You were by your house the whole time. How?" asked Nancy.

"He was trapped in a sort of shadow dimension," said Mike when Will appeared to be struggling to find the words.

"A shadow dimension?" asked Nancy as she looked over at Mike. She turned back to Will and gently took his hands. "Will, if this is too difficult to talk about, just tell me. I'm trying to figure out what happened to Barb so I can save her." Will nodded. "What happened to you? How did you get stuck in the shadow dimension, or wherever you were..."

"The Upside Down," Will finished as he exchanged a glance with Eleven. "I-I was riding down Mirkwood after Dustin got to his house and the monster suddenly appeared in the middle of the road. I was startled and fell off my bike. I looked up and saw it coming toward me and just ran as fast as I could to my house. I called out for Mom and Jonathan, but t-they weren't home. It was somehow able to telekinetically unlock the front door from the outside, so I ran out to the shed and started loading my dad's old shotgun. It suddenly appeared behind me and I just froze. The light bulb glowed really bright, then everything went dark. It was all just..." Will paused and looked at everyone watching him very intently. He felt very self conscious even though he was surrounded by friends. He wrapped his arms around his legs and rested his chin on his knees.

"Dark, cold and empty?" asked Mike when Will appeared to be at a loss for words. Will nodded.

"Everything was dead... just dead. It smelled like rot. The monster

seemed confused for a moment and I used the gun..."

"You fire-balled it," said Lucas. Will smiled slightly for a brief moment and nodded. His smile quickly faded. Mike noticed that Will had a terrified look in his eyes as he told the story. Nancy appeared to be deep in thought. She hesitated, then pulled something out of her pocket. She unfolded a picture, showed it to Will, then pointed at something in the corner.

"Is this the thing that took you to the-the Upside Down?" asked Nancy. Will lifted his eyes and looked to where Nancy was pointing. His eyes widened in recognition and horror as he nodded. Large tears formed and started pouring down his cheeks. Mike rushed to Will's side and pulled him into a tight hug.

"It's still out there," Will sobbed as he started to tremble. "Oh God, it's still out there!"

"It's okay, Will," said Mike. "It won't get you again. We won't let it."

"Jonathan took this picture when he was looking for Will," Nancy said to herself more than to everyone else in the room. "He said she was there one minute and when he looked up again, she was gone... The same thing must have happened to her."

"Mrs. Byers thinks so too," said Dustin.

"Yeah," said Lucas. "We think that lab that El escaped from has something to do with it. Why else would they fake Will's death?"

"El?" asked Nancy. She had seen an extra person sitting with her brother and his friends but had been so distracted by her search for Barb and her surprise at seeing Will sitting in the basement alive and well that she hadn't really registered the new person. "Is that my dress?" asked Nancy as she noticed Eleven was wearing her old pink dress. Eleven squirmed uncomfortably in her chair.

"We, uh, found her on Mirkwood when we were looking for Will Monday night," said Mike. "She's been hiding from the bad people down her since then. She helped us find Will and get him out of the Upside Down."

"There was a portal," said Will as he wiped his eyes. "It wasn't completely open, but I was talking to my Mom. The demogorgan started coming and Mom told me to run. I started running and saw El. She stopped the monster long enough for me to crawl through the portal and get home."

"She has super powers," said Dustin when Nancy had a confused look on her face. "She made Troy pee himself today when he was about to attack Mike."

"She can find people with her mind too," said Lucas. "She found Will with the radio and we could hear him in the Upside Down."

Nancy started to message her temples as she absorbed the new information. "Barb's car was right where she parked it Tuesday night when I went to look for her yesterday afternoon," Nancy muttered to herself. "But the police said her car wasn't there anymore when they were talking to me this morning and they think she ran away. The same people who faked Will's death must have faked Barb running away."

"Oh, Jesus, this is bad," said Dustin. Nancy walked over to Eleven and knelt down next to her just as she had knelt down next to Will a few minutes earlier. She held up the picture of Barb sitting by Steve's pool.

"Do you think you could find my friend Barb like you found Will?" Eleven looked at Nancy carefully and gave a half nod. She had recognized Barb when she saw a picture of her with Nancy the day before when she was waiting for the watch to say three-one-five and Mike to meet her after school. She had a vision when the demogorgan took Barb. She had a similar vision earlier that day when it took two men in the woods. There was a scientist who worked with Papa who was taken as well. The truth was that she feared that Barb and the three men were gone. She had seen the demogorgan hurt them and nothing else.

"How do we do this? Do we need a radio?" asked Nancy. Lucas grabbed his supercom out of his backpack, turned it on and handed it to Eleven. She hesitated for a moment, then grabbed the radio, closed her eyes and focused on finding Barb.

Eleven couldn't see or feel anything beyond the emptiness of the Upside Down as she focused. She started to feel dizzy as the blood bubble formed and burst inside her nose.

"Stop!" said Will. "She's hurting herself!"

"I-I can't find her," said Eleven tearfully to Nancy. Will stood up, walked over to Eleven and squeezed her shoulder. Mike followed.

"You're just tired, you need some rest," said Will.

"Yeah, you blew up the Hamm radio today, that probably took a lot of energy," said Dustin.

"We can try again tomorrow after the funeral," said Mike as he noticed that Eleven looked upset and Will looked frightened.

"Alright," said Nancy. She squeezed Eleven's hand. "Get some rest." She didn't want Barb to spend another night in the Upside Down, especially after the way Will described it, but she didn't want to push an obviously traumatized child either. She glanced at Will. "I'll bring Jonathan over after the funeral. I know he'll want to see you."

"Thanks," said Will.

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Eleven struggled to sleep that night. She'd been struggling to sleep most of her life. Mike, Lucas, and Dustin were all sleeping in the room and Will was in the pillow fort next to her's. It was probably the first time in her life that Eleven wasn't alone in a room while she slept. There was a small comfort in that.

Kindness was a word that she didn't know, but it was a concept that she suddenly understood very well. Benny had been kind to her when he gave her food and dry clothes. He was trying to help her and the bad people had killed him. Mike had been kind to her by taking her in from the rain.

Mrs. Byers had been kind to her, offering to help protect her from the bad people. Will, Nancy, and the others had been kind to her when she was trying to find Barb. They cared that it was making her sick

and scared and told her to stop. Papa would never have told her to stop if she felt scared or sick when using her powers. He locked her in the small dark room when she didn't obey.

She had heard the the word 'friend' before escaping the lab. When Lucas, Dustin, and Mike had told her that they were trying to find their 'friend' Will, she was confused. She had heard Papa use that word when he told her the people watching her trying to contact the demogorgan in the bath were 'friends.' They were all bad people who wanted her to use her powers to hurt others. She liked the way that Mike used the word 'friend' much better.

She heard Will get up and go to the bathroom. It sounded like he was getting sick and she wanted to help him because she wanted to be a friend to him, but couldn't bring herself to move.

Will started to dry heave as he was kneeling next to the toilet. Nothing more was coming up and the muscles constricting in his digestive system was causing him a lot of pain. When it finally stopped, he took a couple of deep breaths as he reached up and flushed the toilet. He got up and washed his hands. He saw dark circles under his eyes as he looked at his reflection in the mirror. There was a nagging feeling in the back of his mind that there was something worse than the demogorgan in the Upside Down. He had felt some sort of sinister presence. He still felt it, like it was watching over all of Hawkins.

You're just imagining things. Will told himself. He desperately wanted to believe that. His heart started racing and he sat on the floor and leaned against the wall as terror gripped him. Will tried not to cry, but it didn't work. He had very little success suppressing the sobs.

"Will?" Will looked up to see Mike standing in the doorway, his face was full of concern. "What's going on?" Will opened his mouth to say something but words failed him. He shook his head.

"I d-don't know, just a bad feeling," Will finally croaked. Mike sat down next to him and pulled him into a hug. Mike had experienced an unbearable couple of hours the night before when he'd seen Will's fake body pulled from the quarry and thought that his best friend was

dead. When Eleven had tuned into Will singing his favorite song over the supercom, Mike had developed a special affection for the Clash.

The events of the last couple days had left Mike with a continual overwhelming urge to hug Will and reassure himself that his friend was safe and alive. Mike also recalled the sound of Will's voice over the Hamm radio that morning as he called out to his mother from the Upside Down or the the way Will had broken down a few hours earlier when he told Nancy about how he ended up in the Upside Down. Mike was determined to do everything he could to keep Will safe.

"There's a lot of bad things happening. If you're having a bad feeling, you should listen to it, Will," said Mike. "We can all work together and do something about whatever it is."

"I think something else was in the Upside Down... something much worse than the demogorgan. I have no idea what it is, but I feel like it's somehow everywhere," said Will.

"We'll figure it out," said Mike. He silently held Will for a few minutes until they found themselves engulfed in a third pair of arms as Eleven joined them.

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Joyce woke up Friday morning feeling a bit disoriented. She remembered pulling Will through a portal the day before. She remembered holding him and not wanted to let him go. She remembered fighting off a monster that was trying to steal her son back. She remembered a brave little girl who had helped him escape. She remembered all of that, but was gripped with the fear that it had been some sort of delusion.

Will was hiding in the Wheelers' basement with the little girl because some mad scientists had fake his death and were possibly after him. Lonnie was there and Joyce didn't trust her ex-husband, so she couldn't even tell Jonathan about Will being alive. Not having Will there to hug and reassure herself that he was really alive and well and not even being able to say that he was alive an well out loud was causing doubts to grown in Joyce's mind.

"Babe, C'mon, you gotta get ready," said Lonnie as he lightly shook Joyce's shoulder. She was curled up in a fetal position on her bed. Joyce balled up her fists and pressed them to her eyes, silently praying that she hadn't imagined the events of the previous afternoon. "The funeral's in a couple hours," Lonnie continued. Joyce fought the urge to scream at him to leave.

Instead, Joyce wordlessly got up and walked over to her closet. She found the dress she'd worn to her Aunt Darlene's funeral in 1978. She didn't own many dresses and didn't care to. After she got dressed, she walked over to Will's room. She heard Jonathan trying on ties in his own room and wanted to go in and talk to him, but decided it was too risky with Lonnie in the house.

Chester was sitting on Will's bed looking sad. He gave a slight wag of his tail as Joyce entered and sat down next to him. She decided to talk to Mike as soon as she got the opportunity. She needed to hear someone else say out loud that Will was alive and well..

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"Wait until we tell Will that Jennifer Hayes was crying at his funeral," said Dustin as he poked Mike and Lucas and pointed at their blonde classmate.

Mike glanced over and saw Jennifer and a few other girls from their class in tears. He thought that Will was too preoccupied at the moment to care who was crying at his funeral. Mike had feared that some of the classmates who had been less than kind to Will throughout the years would use the funeral as an excuse to skip school. Even though he knew that Will was alive, he didn't think he could tolerate anyone doing that.

After the service. Mrs. Byers approached him. "How is he?" she asked after she looked around to make sure no one was listening-other than Lucas and Dustin.

"He was feeling a little sick last night," said Mike. "But Nancy made him some sort of mix with ginger and honey this morning and he was feeling better."

"Nancy knows?" asked Joyce.

"Yeah," said Mike. "She came downstairs to check on us last night. Will told her what happened and she thinks the same thing took Barb. El couldn't find Barb, but she got some rest and we're going to try again today. Nancy said she was working with Jonathan. She was going to bring Jonathan to our house after the funeral to see Will."

Joyce glanced around the cemetery and saw Jonathan sitting behind a hedge talking to Nancy. "Good," said Joyce. "With Lonnie around, I haven't felt safe enough to talk to Jonathan about what happened. Tell Will that I'll come to see him as soon as it's safe." Joyce was feeling increasingly worried that she hadn't heard from Hopper. She also felt that Will should probably see a doctor, but was frustrated that it wasn't safe to take him to one.

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Will smiled as he looked up from his drawing (Mike had left a pad of paper and some colored pencils for him) and saw Eleven levitating Mike's Millennium Falcon.

"Mike, Lucas, and I saw that movie three times in the theater," said Will. "I don't remember a whole lot from being six, but I remember that. I was just so happy that they were my friends."

"Friends," said Eleven with a small smile.

"Yeah. The first thing we did with Dustin when he moved here was take him to see Empire Strikes Back. Even Nancy and Barb liked Stars Wars, but they won't admit that anymore. They kept arguing about whether Leia was going to end up with Luke or Han. They took us to see Return of the Jedi earlier this year because they didn't want to admit to the other people at school that they like Star Wars." Talking about Star Wars had always helped Will keep his mind off things he didn't want to think about.

"Mike said Yoda can move things with his mind," said Eleven as she uttered the longest sentence that Will had heard her use since he'd met her the day before.

"Yeah, Yoda's pretty awesome," said Will. "Barb kept saying that Leia was going to end up with Luke and she was really horrified that they turned out to be twins."

"Twins?" asked Eleven.

"Yeah, they were brother and sister, but they were born at the same time and separated at birth because Obi Wan was hiding them from the Emperor. It's really gross watching that scene where Leia kisses Luke at the beginning of Empire now."

Eleven smiled. She didn't know what Star Wars was, but really wanted to see it because she knew it made Mike and his friends happy. She reached over to pick up the can of lemonade Dustin had left there. It was empty.

"Thirsty?" asked Will.

"Yes," said Eleven. Will looked at his watch.

"No one should be home for a while, we can get something from the kitchen. C'mon." They went up stairs and avoided the windows just in case any neighbors passed by. It wasn't the first time Will had hidden in Mike's basement, though it had been just over four years since the last time. He had frequently hidden at Mike or Lucas's house when his father said or did something that upset him while his mother was at work. Jonathan always told him that he was good at hiding. When Lonnie would come looking for him, he never found him. He always managed to stay hidden until his mother came to find him.

When they got to the refrigerator, there was some sort of dessert Mrs. Wheeler must have made. It was covered with saran wrap. Will grabbed a couple of sodas as Eleven walked over to the TV and turned it on. The Incredible Hulk was on. Eleven leaned against Mr. Wheeler's recliner. Will sighed. A little TV couldn't hurt. He handed Eleven one of the soda cans and sat down next to her.

They watched to the end of the show. Will explained to Eleven that he was really starting to relate to David Banner because now the world thought that he was dead too. Hopefully, that wouldn't last. Eleven decided that she liked the Hulk. He seemed scary at first, but

we really nice to people who needed help. When they show was over, they changed the channel to The Price is Right. Will explained to Eleven that he was always annoyed when people bid a dollar over someone else's bid.

Suddenly, they heard a car pull into the driveway. Will quickly crawled over to the TV and turned it off just as the front door opened and Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler came in with Baby Holly. Will took Eleven's hand and gestured for her to follow him to duck behind the couch as they couldn't get to the basement without being seen by Mike's parents.

"You get the sandwiches while I take this parfait out to the car, Ted," said Mrs. Wheeler.

Baby Holly walked around the sofa and smiled with delight as she saw Will. He had always been her favorite of Mike's friends. Will raised his finger to his lips and Holly imitated him.

"Holly, what are you doing over there?" asked Mrs. Wheeler. Will felt Eleven cling to his arm. He closed his eyes and focused on remaining as still as possible, hoping that Mrs. Wheeler wouldn't notice him.

"We need to talk to the kids about not leaving their junk lying around," said Mr. Wheeler as he picked up the pop cans.

"We'll cut them some slack for now," said Mrs. Wheeler. Will started feeling dizzy. "Mike's best friend just died and Nancy's best friend is still missing. They're both probably having the worst week of their lives. Let's get to the lunch."

She picked up baby Holly and the three Wheelers headed back out to their car and left. Will looked over and noticed that there was no reflection in an old science fair plaque. He thought that it was probably nothing until he saw both Eleven and himself distinctly reappear in the reflection.

"Did you just make us both invisible?" Will asked Eleven. She shook her head.

"I-it wasn't me," said Eleven. She pointed at Will's nose. He raised his

fingers to his nose and brushed his nostrils with the tip of his fingers. When he looked at his fingers, they were covered in fresh blood.

4. Chapter 4

Chapter Four

Will remembered his bloody nose from the day before. His mother had asked him if he'd been hit in the face and he couldn't remember at the time. Thinking back, Will realized that he had not been hit in the face. He had felt dizzy as the membrane grew thinner on the portal and he was focusing on getting to his mother, just as he had felt dizzy moments earlier when focusing on not being seen by the Wheelers.

"We'd better get back downstairs," Will said to Eleven. She nodded. When they get down to the basement, Will paused and looked around.

"Will?" asked Eleven. She put her hand on his forearm. Her eyes widened in understanding. "B-be careful."

"Don't worry. I'll be careful, I promise," said Will as he gave her a reassuring smile. He decided on the wall that bordered the bathroom as it was the safest spot to try his little experiment. He walked up and put his hands on the wall, then focused on the inside of the bathroom just as he'd focused on his mother the day before when he was still in the Upside Down.

Will felt energy pulsing through his arms, then his hands and fingertips and into the wall. After a few seconds, the wall seemed to melt into a layer of membrane. He could see the bathroom on the other side Will felt a bubble swelling in his nose. It quickly burst and he knew that his nose was bleeding again. He pulled back and the membrane faded back into solid wall just as the wall had melted into a membrane seconds earlier.

He glanced at Eleven and decided to try one more thing. He walked into the bathroom and looked at his reflection in the mirror. He could see blood trickling from his nostril and wiped it with his sleeve. Eleven walked up behind him and Will met her gaze in her reflection before he began to focus on not being seen. Within moments, Eleven appeared to be standing alone. Will let go of his concentration and

became visible again. Mr. and Mrs Wheeler hadn't been able to see Eleven either...

Will grabbed Eleven's hand and focused on becoming invisible again. It took a little longer because he was drained from opening a portal in the wall and going invisible seconds earlier, but sure enough, their reflections both vanished for a few moments. Will couldn't hold his concentration very long. He lost his balance and fell to the floor.

"WILL!" Eleven screamed as she knelt beside was trying to catch his breath. The room felt like it was spinning. He clutched his head to steady his mind.

When the throbbing finally started to ebb away, Will looked up at Eleven. "D-do you think something happened to me in the Upside Down? Like when Peter Parker got bitten by a radioactive spider or the Fantastic Four got hit by the cosmic storm?"

Eleven's brow furrowed in confusion. "C-cosmic storm?"

"Sorry," said Will. "It's from the comics we read. Mike and I can show them to you when all this is over.... I was just wondering if the Upside Down somehow affected me."

"Will, your...powers," Eleven remembered the word Dustin had used a few days earlier. "Aren't from the Upside Down."

Will sat up and wiped his nose on his sleeve again. "Is that why the demogorgan came after me?"

"Not sure," said Eleven. "Maybe."

Will bit his lip and rubbed the sides of his head to try to rid himself of the throbbing. He and his friends had loved reading the X-Men comics (and Spiderman and every other character created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby) for as long a he could remember. They had always thought it would be cool to have powers, but the events of the week didn't make Will's newly discovered abilities seem cool to him at that moment.

"Will," said Eleven as she put her hand on his shoulder. "You need to rest."

Normally Will had a tendency to resist when people told him he needed to rest. At that moment, he lacked his normal stubborn streak. "I think you're right." Will decided to sleep in the pillow fort just in case anyone other than his friends or his brother walked into the basement.

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Joyce kept checking over her shoulder to make sure that neither Lonnie nor anyone else was listening to her conversation with Jonathan and Nancy. Lonnie was talking to a couple of his old hunting buddies. Lucas, Mike and Dustin were talking to Mr. Clarke.

"Maybe if that creature shows up again, it'll drive Dad away," said Jonathan as he threw a look of utter disdain in his father's direction.

"I'll figure out how to get rid of him, don't worry about it," said Joyce.

"He's up to something," said Jonathan. "He didn't give a shit about Will missing when I was at his house Tuesday afternoon."

"I know," said Joyce. "But your brother is alive and he needs you right now. Let's focus on that."

"Okay," said Jonathan. "Do you really think this girl can find Barb?" He asked Nancy.

"She found Will, didn't she? And Will recognized the creature in the picture you took just before she disappeared."

"Barb should probably hide too until we figure this out," said Joyce. "Whoever faked Will's death has to be the same people who took Barb's car."

"We need to expose them," said Nancy.

"How?" asked Jonathan.

"I don't know," said Nancy. "But Barb, Will and Eleven are going to spend the rest of their lives hiding from those people if we don't stop them."

"Whatever you're planning, be careful-both of you," said Joyce.

"I'll offer to give Mike, Lucas and Dustin a ride home," said Jonathan.
"I'll talk to Will and this Eleven girl and we'll figure it out from there."

"And I'll talk to Hopper whenever I get a hold of him. He knows people..."

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"Can't sleep?" Eleven asked Will. She'd been looking at Will's pile of drawings that Mike kept when she saw Will shift his position out of the corner of her eye. He shrugged.

"I just keep seeingthings...when I close my eyes."

"Me too," said Eleven.

"I know," said Will. "I'm sorry."

"Why sorry?" asked Eleven.

"I don't know, I just-" Will began, but froze when he heard the basement door open. Eleven became still as Will. They distinctly heard multiple pairs of feet coming down the stairs.

"Will? El?" Mike called softly. Will and Eleven both let out sighs of relief. Will threw the sheet off the front of the fort. Mike, Dustin and Lucas hadn't come alone. As promised, Jonathan was with them.

"Jonathan!" said Will happily as Eleven followed him out of the fort. She walked over and stood next to Mike as Will ran to Jonathan and hugged him. Eleven watched with a sense of awe as Jonathan hugged Will back. She didn't know the word "affection" yet, but she had seen several people show it toward Will in the past day. She was beginning to understand and like the concept. It made her want to stay with and protect her new friends that much more.

Jonathan clutched his younger brother tightly to reassure himself that Will was really. "You're alive!" Jonathan said to Will as tears of joy rolled down his cheeks. "Thank God, you're alive!"

Everyone was silent for a couple minutes to let the Byers brothers have their reunion. Mike broke the ice. "Why were you two hiding in the fort? No one was home."

"We-uh sort of had a close call with your parents this morning," said Will as he leaned his head on Jonathan's shoulder.

"Did they come down here when they came home to pick up the stuff for the lunch or something?" asked Mike. Will shook his head.

"We got thirsty and went upstairs to get something to drink...and the Incredible Hulk was on...then the Price is Right was on..."

"Obviously they didn't see you," said Lucas. "Looks like you were smart to take precautions after that."

Jonathan noticed the blood on Will's sleeve and gently grabbed his arm. "What happen, Buddy? Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I've just had a couple of nosebleeds, that's all," said Will. "That's part of the reason I was lying down."

"I don't think you've gotten nose bleeds since Dad left," said Jonathan as he rubbed circles on Will's back.. "They must be stress related or something."

"Yeah, you're probably right," said Will as he sat down on the couch and rubbed his eyes, fully aware that everyone was looking at him with concern. Jonathan sat next to Will and squeezed his shoulder while Mike sat on his other side and Eleven sat next to Mike. Nancy, Dustin and Lucas all sat at the table. Eleven looked around at every and hesitated for a moment.

"Will," she said. "They'll understand."

"Understand?" asked Mike. "What happened?"

Will took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "There's a reason why your parents didn't see us when they came home."

"What's that?" asked Mike. Will met Mike's gaze, then looked past him to Eleven who nodded encouragingly. He closed his eyes and focused

on becoming invisible. Within seconds he felt the newly familiar sensation of the blood bubble forming in his nose. He heard the sound of his brother, Nancy and his friends. He opened his eyes and looked down to see his hands and legs becoming visible. He wiped the fresh blood on his sleeve.

"Holy shit! That's awesome!" said Dustin. Will shook his head. Tears formed in his eyes.

"I'm a freak," he said hoarsely.

"Well, you're our freak," said Dustin. Will smiled a little in spite of himself.

"There's something else," said Will. "I think I can help get Barb if we find her."

"You do?" asked Nancy hopefully. "How?"

"I think I made that portal when I got out of the Upside Down. I just remember hearing my Mom playing the The Clash and calling to me. I was focused on trying to get to her. I felt a weird energy and when I got out, my nose was bleeding and I felt dizzy just like I did after I'd made myself invisible. I tried it on the wall over there," Will pointed to the bathroom. "And it worked. So if El can find Barb, maybe I can make a portal to where she is and we can get her back."

"Do you feel up to finding her, Eleven?" asked Nancy. Eleven nodded slowly. "Good." Nancy handed tin foil covered paper plates from the funeral lunch to Eleven and Will. "I'm going to get changed, you two can get your strength up."

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"Leave those up," said Joyce to Lonnie as she walked out of her room and saw him starting to take down the Christmas lights. She wanted her alarm system intact in case the demogorgan decided to make a return. She had just changed into jeans and a sweater,

"Babe, these are a fire hazard," said Lonnie.

"They're fine," said Joyce. Lonnie groaned and picked up the planks

of wood to hammer them over the hole in the wall.

"It's a shame what they've done to the family," said Lonnie.

"Who?" asked Joyce.

"The Satler company, I checked out the quarry on the way over. No warning signs, nothing. They outta be held accountable if you ask me."

Joyce carefully considered Lonnie's words. She wanted to hold the people responsible for what happened to Will accountable, but knew it wasn't the Satler company. She began to have suspicions as to why Lonnie was there, but needed proof.

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Nancy was startled by a knock on her window as she finished tying her sneakers. She looked over to see Steve. She decided play it cool, walked over and opened her window to let him in.

"Hey," she said.

"Hey," said Steve as he crawled in. "Is that Jonathan Byers' car parked outside?"

"Um, yeah," said Nancy. "He came here from the funeral and he's talking to my brother in the basement, about you know, Will."

"Oh, that makes sense," said Steve. "Look, I've been a real asshole this week. I shouldn't have broken his camera or been obsessing over how my parents would react when the police asked about Barb."

"Did you get in trouble with them?" asked Nancy.

"Yeah, totally, but screw 'em!" said Steve. "I was thinking maybe we could catch a movie tonight. *All the Right Moves* is still playing." Steve nodded at Nancy's poster of Tom Cruise.

"Can I take a rain check on that? I just don't think I'll be good company until Barb is found.. Especially after what happened to Will."

"Alright, I understand," said Steve. Nancy noticed a caring look in his eyes that she hadn't seen before.

"Thank you," said Nancy. I'll call you this weekend. I have a feeling Barb will be found really soon."

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"We brought some extra radios for a little energy boost," said Lucas as he held up a box of electronics when he and Dustin came back from changing out of their funeral outfits.

"Do those run on batteries?" asked Mike.

"Yeah, we didn't want to burn your house down," said Dustin as he held up a fire extinguisher

"Should we put on some music so your parents don't hear anything?" asked Will.

"Yeah," said Mike. "But let's play it off a cassette and not a radio. El always uses signaless channels."

"I'll grab something from my car," said Jonathan. Nancy came downstairs while Dustin and Lucas were setting up the radios. Mike and Will joined them. She walked over to Eleven.

"How are you feeling?" asked Nancy. Eleven shrugged. "I know this can't be easy, but I just wanted to say thank you for helping to save my friend."

Eleven smiled. She was always scared to use her powers to do the things Papa wanted her to do. He would quietly threaten her if she didn't obey. She had never fully realized how cruel Papa was until meeting people like Benny and Mike. Mike had wanted to find Will, but he wasn't being cruel while pretending to be nice. Nancy and Mrs. Byers had both shown concern for her when she used her powers.

Jonathan came back in. He popped a mix tape into the cassette player and set it on the stairs.

"I think we're ready," said Lucas.

Eleven sat down and looked at the picture of Barb one more time before closing her eyes and focusing. She was in the void, but wasn't walking on water like she normally did when she was in the bath. She saw Barb lying on the ground in the distance, but she wasn't moving. Eleven feared that she'd been right about Barb being gone. She didn't want to be right. She wanted to save Nancy's friend. Eleven slowly approached Barb. She was a strange color and something crawled out of her mouth.

El!" Eleven opened her eyes and saw Mike kneeling beside her. Will was standing just behind him.

"Is Barb okay?" asked Nancy. Eleven opened her mouth, but couldn't bring herself to answer. She suddenly reached over and grabbed Will's wrist. He looked like he'd received an electrical shock. Jonathan rushed to his side to steady him.

"I'm sorry, Nancy," said Will.

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Joyce decided to check in Lonnie's bags while he was in the shower after he'd finished boarding up the hole in the wall. She had some suspicions about why Lonnie was suddenly being so helpful and wanted to confirm them as that confirmation would provide the perfect excuse to get rid of him. She had a lot to do in order to protect Will and Eleven, and couldn't do it with Lonnie there. Joyce found a flyer for a law firm and knew she couldn't trust her ex-husband with the secret that Will was still alive.

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Nancy absorbed the full meaning of Will's apology. She hoped that maybe he and Eleven were mistaken, but knew that they weren't. She nodded and went out the back door. Nancy leaned against the side of the house and slid down the wall. She buried her face in her hands. Barb, her best friend for as long as she could remember was dead. Gone forever. So many things could have happened differently and Barb would still be alive.

Nancy felt guilty for being annoyed with Will when he got lost a few days earlier because it had disrupted her plans to meet with Steve. She had used the assembly for Will as an excuse to sneak to Steve's party. Barb hadn't wanted to go, but Nancy had pressured her. Barb hadn't wanted to knife a hole in the side of a beer can and chug it, but Nancy had pushed her. After all that, Nancy had basically ditched Barb and Barb had waited outside for her....on the diving board over the pool... while she was bleeding.

"Nancy?" said Mike. Nancy removed her hands from her face and looked up to see Mike standing with Jonathan.

"It's attracted to blood," said Nancy. "Barb must have bled into the pool and it drew out the monster."

"I'm sorry," said Mike.

"It's not your fault, Mike. It's mine. I'm the one that caused Barb to get taken by that thing and I have to make it right."

"How?" asked Mike.

"We draw it out with blood, then we kill it. We can get Barb's body back too. At least let her parents know what happened to her. And then, we expose those assholes at the lab. Then at least Will and Eleven can be safe. Can you help me, Jonathan?"

"Yeah, of course," said Jonathan.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mike.

"Monster hunting," said Nancy. She went back inside the house and Jonathan and Mike followed her. "Eleven, where did you see Barb?" asked Nancy.

Eleven closed her eyes for a few seconds then walked over and grabbed Will's hand. Will stumbled backward as though he'd received an electric shock. He fell to his knees.

"Will!" said Mike, Jonathan, Lucas, and Dustin in unison. Jonathan rushed to his brother's side.

"I'm sorry," said Eleven.

"It's alright," said Will. He looked at Nancy. "The library. She's at the main library. I saw a lot of old skeletons there. This must have happened before."

"I bet those assholes at the lab covered it up before."

"They're probably covering up a lot more than we can imagine," said Jonathan.

"So we expose them," said Nancy. "We have to make a plan and we have to get Barb's body back. It's probably best if we wait until dark tomorrow."

"How are you going to get Barb's body back?" asked Dustin..

"Maybe I can open a portal," said Will. He was compelled to do something-anything- to help. He hated not doing anything for the others.

"You probably can," said Jonathan. "But I'd prefer we do that as a last resort."

"What? Why?" asked Will.

"Will, you get a bloody nose and feel dizzy when you use your powers and so does Eleven. That can't be good. Mom said the monster came out of the wall. If that's the case and we attract it with blood, maybe it'll open the portal for us."

"At least take me with you when you go," said Will.

"I don't want to put you in danger," said Jonathan.

"I don't want *you* to be in danger," said Will. "What if you get trapped in the Upside Down? If I'm there, at least I can reopen the portal if it closes while you're getting Barb."

"We can be there too," said Mike. "You'll need as much help as you can get."

"Yeah, and we can help you plan," said Lucas.

"We have until tomorrow night," said Nancy. "Let's get started. We can go to your house and check on your Mom, Jonathan. Maybe she's gotten a hold of Hopper. He can help us."

Jonathan nodded. He hugged Will and he and Nancy headed back to the Byers home. Lucas and Dustin had been whispering for a couple of minutes.

"Dustin and I are going to go investigate," said Lucas. "See if we can find anything."

"No, it's not safe," said Will.

"Don't worry," said Dustin as he looked at his compass. "We know what we're up against now and we'll be careful."

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Jonathan heard his parents shouting and he and Nancy approached his house. He picked up his pace.

"Oh don't do that," said Joyce.

"Do what?" asked Lonnie

"Lie to me!" said Joyce.

"I'm not lying!"

"Well, where does he wanna go?"

"What?"

"Where does Jonathan want to go to college?"

"We get that money, anywhere he damn well pleases!"

"Money!" said Jonathan as he turned to Nancy. "Of course he's here for the money!" Jonathan pushed the door open as his mother was shouting at his father that Jonathan had wanted to go to NYU since he was six years old. He went right to Lonnie and shoved him against the wall.

"You're going to leave right now, you greedy son of a bitch," said Jonathan.

"Jonathan, I'm trying to help. Your mother's hysterical right now," said Lonnie.

"Bullshit! You've never helped anyone in your life and you never will."

"You both need me here," said Lonnie smugly.

"Oh we haven't needed you for a long time," said Joyce as she grabbed Lonnie's bag and threw it on the porch.

Jonathan thought about the revelation he'd learned that afternoon. Will had unknowingly used his power of invisibility to hide from

Lonnie many times as a kid. Lonnie had made Will want to hide and now he was trying to make money off of Will's "death." He angrily dragged Lonnie to the door as Nancy stepped out of the way and shoved him onto the porch. Joyce slammed the door shut. They waited until they saw Lonnie finally get into his car and drive away.

"Are you alright, Mom?"

Joyce looked at Jonathan then hugged him. "I'm a lot better than I was a few minutes ago." She pulled away and mouthed "Let's talk somewhere outside."

Jonathan nodded. The three of them walked to the back porch (Joyce grabbed her lighter and a couple of towels), then past the shed. "They may have bugged the house," said Joyce. "Eleven said they were here."

"Let's go the Castle Byers," said Jonathan. They walked to the woods to the fort than Jonathan and Will had built the night Lonnie had left. Even though they'd both gotten sick for a week, it had been one of the best nights of their lives.

"How's Will, is he alright?" asked Joyce as they went into the fort and sat down. Nancy marveled at Will's drawings on the wall. She had heard Mike mention the fort a few times, but had never given it much thought. She was impressed as she looked around.

"He's okay, all things considered. I think he wants to come home though," said Jonathan.

"And was Eleven able to find Barb?" asked Joyce. Nancy looked away.

"Yeah, she found her.. dead," said Nancy.

"Oh, no!" said Joyce as she reached over and took Nancy's hand. "I'm so sorry. Her parents..."

"Are going to be devastated when they find out," said Nancy. "We have a plan to get her body out of that place and we need to figure out a way to expose those bastards at the lab and kill that monster-for what they did to Barb and to keep Will and Eleven safe. Have you heard from Hopper?"

"Not yet," said Joyce.

"Eleven saw Barb in the library and showed Will her vision. He said he saw skeletons in there. That means this isn't the first time something like this has happened. It won't be the last time if we don't stop them," said Nancy.

"There's something else," said Jonathan.

"What is it?" asked Joyce.

"Will, he has powers. That's probably why the monster went after him. Barb was bleeding. Will wasn't," said Jonathan.

"Powers?" asked Joyce. "What powers?"

"He can make himself invisible. That's probably why Dad could never find him when he hid at Mike or Lucas's house when he was little. His nose bleeds-just like Eleven- when he uses his powers. I remember how he used to get nosebleeds that stopped after Dad left. He must have been making himself invisible to hide from Dad without even knowing it. I always wondered why he was so good at hiding.

Joyce closed her eyes and shook her head. "Your father's never getting anywhere near either of you again. Not that he'd want to."

"There's something else," said Jonathan. "He can make portals. He must have made the portal to get out of that place."

"And you said he gets nosebleeds like Eleven when he uses his powers?" asked Joyce.

"Yes," said Jonathan. Joyce ran her fingers through her hair and clutched the back of her head. "Mom, what is it?"

"Something happened to me when I was a little younger than you," said Joyce. "Something near that lab."

"What?"

"I don't know. I got some sort of electric shock from the fence and the

next thing I knew, I was waking up in the hospital. After that, I was just on edge all the time and started smoking to calm my nerves."

"Do you think that has something to do with Will's powers?" asked Nancy.

"I don't know, maybe," said Joyce. "I just need to talk to Hopper. He has to be able to find something, he has to."

"So they've been at this for a while," said Jonathan.

"What's your plan?" asked Joyce.

"We were going to go to the library after dark tomorrow," said Nancy. "Hopper can be some help with that."

"Will offered to open a portal, but we're trying to avoid that," said Jonathan. "Those nosebleeds he and Eleven get when they use their powers can't be good."

"You're probably right about that," said Joyce.

"We were thinking about using blood to get the monster to come to us. It would open a portal we can use to get Barb's body and we can figure out a way to kill it between now and tomorrow night."

"That sounds dangerous," said Joyce. "What if it takes both of you to that place?"

"It won't," said Jonathan. "We have an idea of what we're up against and we'll know for sure tomorrow."

"Are you sure blood will work?" asked Joyce.

"It's just a theory right now," said Nancy. "We were going to go into the woods and test it."

"That's definitely dangerous," said Joyce.

"No more dangerous than staying in the house," said Jonathan. "That thing has attacked at least three times and those scientists may be spying on us."

"Fair point," said Joyce. She didn't want Jonathan out in the woods looking for an inter-dimensional monster, but it was their best option. "Just don't stay out too late."

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"Shouldn't we be following the compasses?" asked Lucas.

"We will," said Dustin. "I just want to check this area out first. It's where Barb disappeared, so maybe we'll find a clue or two."

Lucas looked at his compass. "I'm pretty sure it's pointing at Hawkins Lab. We need to stop those assholes from getting Will."

"And Eleven," said Dustin.

"And Eleven," said Lucas. "Do you think she did something to Will?"

"What do you mean?" asked Dustin.

"I don't know," said Lucas. "He seemed really dizzy when she showed him her vision of where Barb was."

"I don't think she was trying to hurt him," said Dustin.

"Neither do I," said Lucas. "But she was raised by those scientist. What if she doesn't understand the consequences of her actions?"

"Then we'll help her learn," said Dustin.

"Yeah, of course we will," said Lucas. "I'm just worried about Will. He's been through a lot and he might put himself in danger if he's trying to help us. He offered to open the portal to get Barb's body and using his powers makes him sick."

"Then we'll have to figure out how to kill the monster as soon as possible so Will doesn't hurt himself trying to save us," said Dustin.

"I think I see something," said Lucas. He walked over and gingerly brushed some leaves aside.

"That doesn't look like the footprint of anything that lives around

here," said Dustin.

"What are you losers doing here? Trying to join your friend as worm food?" Dustin and Lucas looked up to see Tommy H. approaching them. He was followed by Carol. Lucas and Dustin jumped to their feet. They both wanted to punch Tommy for joking when the whole town thought that Will was dead.

"Hey, my boyfriend asked you a question," said Carol.

"None of your damn business, asshole," said Lucas. Tommy laughed.

"Looks like we need to teach these little dorks some respect," said Tommy. In a swift motion he walked up to the two party members, shoved Lucas to the ground and grabbed Dustin by his collar. Dustin quickly kicked Tommy in the groin and fell to the ground as the older boy doubled over, cutting his hand.

"You're both dead," Tommy grunted as Dustin looked at his bleeding hand. He started to feel light headed.

"What the hell, Tommy?" said Steve Harrington as he ran toward the group. "Are you really picking on these kids? Their friend just died! What's wrong with you?"

"We were just having a little fun," said Carol.

"Fun? He's bleeding!" said Steve as he indicated Dustin.

"What is with you?" asked Tommy. "The princess has turned you into a little bitch."

"You're both assholes," said Steve.

"What did you say?" asked Tommy.

"You heard me," said Steve. "Now get the hell out of here and be assholes somewhere else."

"What don't you make me," said Tommy.

"You really wanna do that?" asked Steve. "You're still doubled over

from a seventh grader kicking you in the balls."

"Let's go, Carol," said Tommy.

"Are you two okay?" asked Steve as he walked up to Dustin and Lucas. They didn't have a chance to answer as an opening suddenly appeared in a nearby tree and the demogorgan crawled out. "HOLY SHIT!" Steve shouted as he flung his arms out and stood between the two boys and the monster.

Lucas and Dustin fumbled through their backpacks as the demogorgan's face opened up and it let out a shrill scream.

"Steve, get out of the way," said Lucas.

"What?" asked Steve. He turned around to see Dustin putting a rock into a towel, then lighting it on fire as Lucas held it. Lucas began to spin the flaming towel and Steve dropped to the ground. Lucas release the towel and it flew through the air and hit the monster. The demogorgan screamed in agony and scrambled back into the hole in the tree.

"Nancy was right," said Dustin as he looked at his bleeding hand. "Blood attracts it."

"Nancy?" asked Steve. "What does she have to do with this and what was that thing?"

Dustin and Lucas looked at each other.

"Come on, you little shit heads. Out with it," said Steve.

"He did just help us and he saw the demogorgan," said Dustin.

"Demogorgan?" asked Steve.

"It took our friend Will," said Dustin. "And it look Barb."

Steve wasn't sure what to believe, but he had just seen something very weird with his own eyes, so the kids had to be telling the truth. "Nancy told me she saw a man without a face.... Were you two out here trying to track it and and hunt it by yourselves or something."

"Yeah, something like that," said Lucas.

"You're putting yourselves in danger," said Steve.

"It's not like we could get any adults to believe or help us," said Dustin. Steve looked at Dustin's hand.

"C'mon, kid, let's get you cleaned up before you get an infection," said Steve. He turned and headed to his house. Lucas and Dustin stood there dumbfounded. Was Steve Harrington trying to help them? "LET'S GO!" said Steve. Dustin and Lucas followed him.

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A million thoughts went through Joyce's head as she untangled the Christmas lights that Lonnie had so carelessly taken down. She was worried about Jonathan and Nancy out in the woods testing their theory. She has briefly considered going with them, but was still waiting to hear from Hopper. She was also worried about Will and Eleven hiding in Mike's basement. She was still trying to process the fact that Will had powers and the maniacs at Hawkins Lab likely knew about those powers.

Joyce suddenly started thinking about the day Will was born. She had felt that something had happened that day as there was a period of several hours she couldn't remember. Lonnie had always worked really hard to convince her she'd imagined it all. *Lonnie!* Joyce clenched her fists around the chords of the Christmas lights. What if he knew the truth about what happened when she was in labor with Will? What if he was working with the lab? Was that why he never returned her calls when Will went missing? Was it why he showed up to make money off of Will's "death? Was it why he tried to get her drunk? Were all his actions in the past week and throughout Will's life more sinister than those of an indifferent father?

Joyce was startled out of her thoughts by some persistently aggressive knocking on the door. It must've been Lonnie, back to try his scam again. Joyce angrily threw down her lights and muttered through gritted teeth that she was going to murder Lonnie, but when she opened the door, she found the person (aside from her children) she was most eager to see.

Joyce opened her mouth to say something, but Hopper held his finger to his lips and held up a piece of paper that said "Don't say a word." He looked alarmed as he saw all the Christmas lights around the house. Hopper spent the next half hour unscrewing all the bulbs on the Christmas lights as well as checking the lamps and the phone. Joyce considered explaining to him that she'd already checked, but realized she wasn't sure.

"It should be okay," said Hopper finally. "I can't guarantee, but it should be okay."

Joyce considered him carefully for a few moments. She was mostly sure that she could trust him, but with the safety of Will (and Eleven) on the line, she wanted to be completely sure.

"Hopper, what's going on?"

"They bugged my place."

"Who?"

"I don't know. The CIA, the NSA, the department of Energy; I don't know."

"They bugged your place?"

"It's because they know I'm on to them. I went to the morgue, Joyce. Will's body, it was a fake. You were right, you were right all along."

Joyce took a deep breath and nodded. Hopper was absolutely on her side. She knew that. "There's something I have to tell you, Hop. I need your help. We need your help."

"We?" asked Hopper. "Who? You and Jonathan?"

"Yes, me, Jonathan... and Will. Hopper, he's alive. I found him, I brought him back."

Hopper glanced around the house trying to remember if he'd searched everywhere.

"He's not here. I didn't think it was safe. That thing's still out there

and those people are still up to something. Them bugging your place proves that and Eleven said they were here."

"Eleven?"

"She's a little girl who must be Will's age. She escaped from Hawkins lab. She said they killed Benny Hammond."

Hopper looked up sharply. "Does Eleven have a shaved head, by any chance?"

"Yes," said Joyce. "How did you know?"

"The day Benny died, Earl said he saw kid with a shaved head. When I pressed, he said it could be Will, but I've been chasing after some other kid this whole time I've been looking for Will."

"Will's friends found her when they were looking for him Monday night. She has abilities and she helped find Will. She helped him escape from that place. She has some sort of psychic link with him."

"Looks like they didn't listen to me when I told them to go right home after school and stay there," Hopper paused for a moment. His eyes widened. "Hang on." Hopper went out to his car and grabbed a box from under a floorboard. He pulled out some files he'd printed out from the microfiche when he came back inside. He showed Joyce a picture of Dr. Brenner surrounded by several children in hospital gowns, then pulled out articles about missing kids.

"There have been a lot of lawsuits over the years, but they've been dismissed and Hawkins in a small town in the middle of nowhere. Compared to the pentagon papers and the Iranian hostage crisis and the cold war, who cares about that, right?"

"He must have kidnapped Eleven from her parents," said Joyce. "And now he probably wants to take Will too. That has to be why they faked his death."

"He wants to take Will?" asked Hopper. "Why would he want to take Will?"

Joyce slowly lifted her eyes as they met Hopper's. "He has abilities,

apparently. He can make himself invisible. He used to get nosebleeds when I was still married to Lonnie, but they stopped after Lonnie left. He was hiding and didn't realize he was making himself invisible. He also made a portal from that other dimension-the kids are calling in the Upside Down- and I was able to pull him through."

"Other dimension?"

"Yes, it's where that creature I saw came from. Will said it was like here, but empty and cold. I know it sounds crazy," she added hastily.

Hopper shook his head. "It doesn't. I saw something when I broke into the lab. It was some sort of opening covered in rot and vines. They must have caused this."

Hopper pulls out a file marked "Ives, Terry" and showed it to Joyce. "She's not far from here, but you said this Eleven is Will's age. What is this Terry Ives is Eleven's mother."

"She could help us expose the lab," said Joyce.

"I've got some contacts," said Hopper. "I'll call them from a payphone out of town and we can pay Terry Ives a visit tomorrow."

"There's something else," said Joyce. "Barbara Holland was killed by that monster. Eleven said her body is in the library in the other dimension. Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan, and the others have a plan to get her out tomorrow night and they need your help."

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Mike poked his food around his plate at dinner. Nancy had told her mother that she was staying with a friend for the night. Mike was actually worried about his sister for the first time in a long time. She and Jonathan were both out in the woods somewhere trying to hunt an inter-dimension that had killed Barb and kidnapped Will. There were also "bad people" out there looking for Eleven-and possibly Will as well. They had killed Benny Hammond and likely others. Mike wasn't sure whether the demogorgan or the agents at Hawkins lab made him more nervous. He felt scared for Dustin and Lucas as well.

Will seemed to be getting sick. He'd spent four days in an alternate

dimension that was dark, cold and likely toxic. His head felt hot and his face was looking really flushed. Mike had briefly considered asking his mother for help. She had insisted that he come up for dinner, even though he'd said he didn't feel like it. He watched his father eating and not paying attention to anything that was going on and his mother trying to feed baby Holly. They were acting like nothing happened, like Barb wasn't missing and like they hadn't gone to Will's funeral that morning.

As often as his mother told Mike he could talk to her, he never quite believed her. She didn't take him seriously. She often rolled her eyes at the things Mike got excited about or the things that upset him. Mrs. Byers never did that to Will. She always showed interest in his drawings, writing and games. Mike loved his parents, he just didn't enjoy their company.

He planned to grab some medicine for Will while his parents distracted after dinner. Hopefully it would make him feel better. Mike felt frustrated and powerless about the whole situation. He just wanted Will and Eleven to be safe.

"Aren't you hungry, Mike," asked Karen.

"Not really, can I be excused?" asked Mike.

"We're trying to have a nice family dinner," said Ted.

"Nice family dinner?" asked Mike incredulously. "We're just sitting here and not saying anything! We never talk-not about anything I want to talk about at least."

"Michael, you can talk to us," said Karen.

"I really can't," said Mike.

"Of course you can, honey," said Karen.

"You either don't believe me or you think everything I care about is stupid."

"That's not true," said Karen.

"Yes it is!" said Mike. "You think I don't notice you rolling your eyes every time I bring up A.V. club, or D&D or Star Wars."

"Michael, that is really unfair. You're talking about silly things," said Ted.

Mike glared at his father, grabbed his plate and took it to the sink. He then headed up the stairs to his room.

"Michael wait!" he heard his mother call. He slammed his bedroom door and waited a couple of minutes. He then went back out into the hall and heard his parents arguing. part of him felt bad about getting them into a fight. That wasn't his intention. He tiptoed to the bathroom and grabbed some medicine before going back to his room and waiting for his mother to knock on the door. He grabbed the picture of his friends winning the science fair (the one that Eleven had seen and pointed at Will). Holding it gave him the backing he needed to convince his mother that he just needed to be left alone.

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"I think I'm going to just go to sleep," said Will. He'd been resting on the couch all evening. He was running a slight fever, but felt cold. He couldn't completely shake the penetrating coldness of the Upside Down.

"Maybe...maybe we should call a doctor," said Mike as he reached over and felt Will's burning forehead. There were dark circles under his eyes and his face was abnormally flushed. He'd been getting worse all afternoon and evening.

"No," said Will as he shook his head. "We can't risk it. They might be working for the lab."

"Look, just promise me you'll let me know if it becomes a code red or something," said Mike.

"I promise," said Will. "I'm sure I'll feel better in the morning. I just need to sleep and let that medicine you gave me kick in."

"Yeah, you're probably right," said Mike. He certainly hoped that Will was right. Mike and Eleven watched as Will crawled under the sheet

and into the fort.

Eleven felt a little awkward. Even though she'd only known Will for a day, she had started to rely on him. He could see her thoughts and interpret them for everyone else. Mike could understand her most of the time, but Will still made it easier.

"El?" said Mike as they sat on the couch.

"Yes?" said Eleven.

"I-I just wanted to say that I'm really glad I met you. I mean, I wish Will wasn't taken by an evil monster, but I'm happy that you're here."

"I'm glad too, Mike," said Eleven.

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Will somehow felt like he was intruding on something very personal between Mike and Eleven simply by being in the same room. He had always enjoyed being with his friends, but he really just wanted to go home.

He was in a state somewhere between being asleep and awake and a million thoughts were running through his head.

You don't belong here.

You're putting your friends in danger.

You'll get Mike and Eleven and all the Wheelers sick.

You're a burden to your mother.

You're a burden to your brother.

Barb is dead, you should be too.

You brought something back with you.

It's coming for you.

It will kill everyone you care about.

Will's eyes slowly opened. He blinked back tears. It was dark. The Upside Down was dark. It wasn't cold or dead like the Upside down though. Will slowly sat up. He wasn't quite awake. He walked to the basement door. He lifted his hand and hesitated. He didn't want anything to happen to Mike or Eleven. He pushed the door open and walked through it.

6. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

"I want to help," said Steve as he finished bandaging Dustin's hand. Dustin exchanged a confused look with Lucas.

"You want to help? You believe us?" said Dustin.

"I saw the same monster you saw with my own eyes, didn't I, dipshit," said Steve as he started packing the supplies back in his first aid kit. "Besides, Nancy is involved. I want to help her. Her best friend got taken by that thing in my backyard. So tell me, what can I do to help and where's Nancy."

"She and Jonathan went out to try to see if they could lure it out with blood and try to kill it," said Lucas.

"Jonathan Byers?" asked Steve. "Does he think that thing killed his brother? That's why you two were out looking for it, you think it killed your friend."

Dustin and Lucas shared another significant look. "Can you keep a secret?" Dustin asked Steve. "Like a really, really huge secret?"

"Huh?" said Steve.

"We need you to make the most excellent promise you could possibly make," said Lucas.

"What is this? E.T or something?" asked Steve.

"It's very serious," said Dustin. "We need you to promise to keep our secret."

"Fine, I promise," said Steve.

Lucas took a deep breath. "Will isn't dead."

"Um, they found his body in the quarry," said Steve.

"That was fake," said Dustin. "That monster kidnapped him, but he escaped. He's hiding right now because some agents from Hawkins Lab might be looking for him."

"Hawkins Lab?"

"Yeah, we're pretty sure their experiments caused all this. Another kid escaped from the the night Will disappeared. Benny Hammond tried to help her and they killed him. We found her when we were looking for Will. She helped him escape from the Upside Down." Lucas explained.

"Upside Down?" asked Steve. "What the hell is the Upside Down?"

"It's another dimension. It's like hear, but cold, dark, and empty," Dustin explained. "Will was trapped there until yesterday and we're pretty sure the people at Hawkins Lab faked his death to cover up whatever they're doing."

Steve felt light headed. He slowly sank into a chair. "I had to ask," he muttered ask he buried his face in his hands.

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"I'll check on Mom real quick, then give you a ride home," Jonathan said to Nancy as he opened the front door to the Byers home. Hopper was sitting at the kitchen table with Joyce. They were going through boxes of files and printouts from the microfiche archives at the library.

Joyce looked up and saw Jonathan. Relief flooded across her face. She set down the file she'd been reading and went over to hug her older son.

"What's going on here?" asked Jonathan. "What are these files."

"Stuff I found on Hawkins Lab when I was looking for Will," said Hopper.

"So you also think they're involved in this?" asked Jonathan.

"I know they are," said Hopper. "I saw the gate to that other

dimension in the lab when I broke in looking for Will. They drugged me and bugged my place because I was getting to close to the truth."

"Are you finding anything useful in these files?" asked Nancy.

"We found a woman we think might be Eleven's mother," said Hopper. "We're going to pay her a visit tomorrow. But we're looking for as many options as possible to expose those bastards. It looks like they've kidnapped a lot of kids over the years."

"I'll help," said Nancy. "I want to bring those assholes down."

Nancy took a few files out of the desk and sat on the couch. Jonathan followed suit. Joyce and Hopper didn't object. After a couple of hours of reading files, Nancy fell asleep. Jonathan and the others decided not to wake her. He removed the file she was reading from her hand and draped a blanket over her.

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A chilly breeze brought Will out of his trance. He looked around. It was almost pitch dark and he was surrounded by trees. His heart started racing. He had no idea how he'd gotten there or where exactly he was. What if he was back in the Upside Down? His surroundings didn't reek of death and decay. Will reached over and felt the nearest tree trunk. It wasn't covered with the slime of the Upside Down.

His eyes were suddenly filled with a blinding light. Someone was shining a flashlight in his face. "Hey there, kid, you lost?" Will put his hand up to shield his eyes from the flashlight.

"What a minute, that's Will Byers," said a second voice. Panic shot through Will's entire body. He didn't recognize either voice. He took a step back and tripped over a tree root.

"GET HIM!" shouted the first man. Will scrambled to get to his feet, but his fatigue slowed him down. The second man tackled him and knocked the wind out of him.

"LET ME GO!" Will shouted over and over as his futilely struggled against a captor three times his size. The man pinned Will's arms behind his back.

"Brenner just may give us promotions," said the first man.

"Let's get him to the lab," said the second man.

"NO!" Will shouted as he was pulled to his feet and he continued to struggle. "Nononononono!"

The sound of a twig loudly tracking caught his attentions as well as the attention of his captors.

"What was that?" asked the first man.

"Could be the girl," said the second. "Get your tranquilizers and check."

Will's eyes widened. "EL, RUN!" he shouted.

"Trank him," said the second man to the first.

"I only have one dart left and I'm saving it for the girl," said the first man. "There should be some chloroform in the case. That should put him out until he get him to the lab."

The first man took his flash light and tiptoed into the woods. Will had no idea whether Eleven was actually there or not, but he hoped she wasn't. He knew how scared she was of the lab. The second man dragged Will by his arm over to a briefcase and began to rummage around in it to find the chloroform with one hand as he roughly twisted Will's arm behind his back with the other. Will concentrated on not crying out in pain. He didn't want to give his captor the satisfaction. He tried to think of a way to escape when he heard the first man cry out in terror. The second man looked in the general direction of the scream.

He pulled a pair of restraints connected to some sort of cable and a roll of duct tape out of the case. He then wrapped the cable around the tree and forced Will's hands into the restraints. Will struggled as much as he could, but had very little energy. The restraints were metallic and shaped like mittens. Will couldn't move his fingers. The agent then put some duct tape over Will's mouth.

"I'll be back in a minute, kid. You're sister's given us a lot of trouble,

but that's about to end."

Will struggled as the man walked away to help his partner. After a few seconds he decided to take a break to clear his mind. He sat down and leaned against the tree. He'd been so preoccupied with trying to escape, that he didn't even register the words "*You're sister's given us a lot of trouble*" and he still didn't. There was a painful throbbing in his hear, he still felt feverish, and he was seeing spots.

He heard and unpleasantly familiar noise, followed by a scream of terror from the man who had just tied him to a tree. Eleven wasn't giving the agents trouble, it was the demogorgan. Will started to panic. Getting trapped in the Upside Down again was much worse than getting trapped in the lab.

Will did the only thing he could think of- he made himself invisible. He wasn't sure how much good it would do as he had a feeling that the monster could somehow sense him, but he was his best hope. Will quickly felt himself grow dizzy. Blood started to trickle from his nose and he wiped it on his shoulder fearing it would make it that much easier for the demogorgan to find him.

Then he saw it, the demogorgan dragging the two mangled bodies of the agents that planned to take him to Hawkins lab. The demogorgan didn't seem to sense him. It was likely occupied with the blood on the two bodies it carried. Will saw a portal open up in the trunk of one of the larger trees. The demogorgan crawled through dragging the two bodies with him.

Will kept himself invisible as long as possible. He didn't know who or what would come along while he was tied up to a tree. Will passed out after a couple minutes.

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Mike woke up around 8:30 the next morning as Lucas tapped him on the shoulder. The basement was cold. He saw Eleven's head on his shoulder and felt his cheeks burn.

"Did my mom let you guys in or something?" asked Mike as he rubbed his eyes.

"No, you guys left the basement door open all night, dumb ass," said Dustin.

"What?" asked Mike as he quickly sat up, waking Eleven. "No we didn't." He got up, walked over to the pillow fort, and pulled the sheet back. "Will?" It was empty. He stood up and ran over to the bathroom. The door was ajar. He turned on the light and looked inside. Empty. Mike felt the panic growing in his stomach. He ran over to the back door and looked outside. He felt as though a bucket of ice had been dumped in his stomach. There were some small, barely visible footprints leading away from the house. Mike ran his right hand through his hair then starting pulling on it in frustrating.

"Mike, where's Will?" asked Lucas slowly. Mike rested his head on the door frame and closed his eyes.

"We have to find him. He was feeling sick last night and went to sleep a few hours before we fell asleep. The demogorgan and the bad people are out there."

"El, can you find him?" asked Dustin. Eleven had actually started looking for Will in her head the moment Mike pulled back the sheet to reveal the empty pillow fort. She saw him tied to a tree with the restraints the bad men at the lab sometimes used on her as an alternative to the small, dark room. He wasn't awake and he was in danger.

Eleven opened her mouth to answer Dustin's question, but the memories of the lab came flooding back into her brain. She wished that Will was there with her to help her explain what she saw. She'd only known him for a couple of days, but had quickly grown accustomed to having him there to help her communicate with the others. She'd grown accustomed to someone who, with no effort, understood what she'd been through in her life. She had also seen Will in her head for a while. She cared about him very deeply, even though she'd spent so little time with him in person. They just easily bonded and trusted each other. She had easily bonded with and trusted Mike as well, but Will was different. Will was suddenly taken from her and it made her feel frightened and powerless.

"What did you do to Will?" Lucas suddenly asked. Eleven froze. She

couldn't help but feel that everything that had happened to Will was her fault. She remembered how angry Mike and the others had been a few days earlier when the fake body was pulled from the quarry and they thought she was lying about Will being alive.

"Leave her alone, Lucas," said Mike. "She didn't do anything to Will!"

"Oh, really?" said Lucas. "Did you see what happened to Will when she showed him that Barb was dead yesterday? Has it even occurred to you that maybe she's making him sick."

"He was trapped in the Upside Down for four days," said Mike.

"Yeah, and she admitted it herself, *she* opened the gate and let the demogorgan loose," said Lucas.

"And Will saw her memories and the bad people made her do it," said Mike.

Eleven couldn't find her voice to tell the others that they needed to hurry and find Will. She decided to simply find Will. She slipped out the open door without the others knowing and headed toward the forest.

"She's been putting Will in danger and you don't wanna see it," said Lucas angrily.

"No she hasn't!" said Mike. "She found Will."

"Oh, really? Am I imagining the fact that Will disappeared while you were busy snuggling with her all night?"

"It wasn't like that!" said Mike defensively.

"Guys," said Dustin. "Where's El?" Mike started to look around frantically. He resisted the urge to call out to her because he didn't want his parents to hear.

"We have to find her," said Mike.

"We have to find *Will!*" said Lucas.

"We have to find them both," said Mike.

"How do we suggest we do that?" asked Lucas.

"I don't know," said Mike. "Maybe start now? El just left a couple minutes ago. She probably went to find Will. If we find her, we find him."

"Why did she leave? You can look for her if you want, I'm finding Will," said Lucas. He checked his backpack for his supercom and his compass, then threw it over his shoulder.

"C'mon, guys," said Dustin. "We need to stick together."

"We need to get moving," said Lucas. He walked outside, got on his bike, and rode off.

"Lucas, wait!" Dustin called. Lucas was already halfway down the street. "Shit!"

"He's right, we need to get moving," said Mike. He grabbed his backpack. "I can't believe Lucas thinks El would hurt Will."

"He's just worried about Will, that's all. He knows she wouldn't hurt him on purpose. We had a pretty stressful night last night. Bikes?"

"We should go on foot," said Mike. "El and Will did, and it looks like they went into the woods."

"Okay, let's go," said Dustin.

"What happened last night?" asked Mike.

"Steve Harrington chased off a couple of bullies for us?"

"He did?"

"Yeah, we were looking near his house because that's where Barb disappeared and that Tommy asshole and his girlfriend Carol started harassing us. I cut my hand." Dustin held up his bandaged hand. "But we know blood attracts the demogorgan."

"Wait a minute, you saw the demogorgan?"

"Yeah, but we put a rock into a flaming towel and threw it at him. He ran away. So we know fire is good for protection."

"So it's still in the woods...where Will has been and where El just went...We have to hurry." Mike and Dustin began to walk a lot more quickly.

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Joyce approached Terry Ives who was staring off into space. "She hasn't spoken in about five years," said Becky. "You're wasting your time."

Joyce felt she had to try to talk to Terry. If the loss of her daughter caused her catatonic state, finding her might bring her back. "Miss Ives, my name is Joyce Byers. I think your daughter escaped from from Dr. Brenner's lab. I just found out that my son has abilities too and Brenner may have faked his death just like he faked Jane's when she was born. With your help, we might be able to stop him. We can keep my son safe and reunite you with your daughter."

"Jane!" Terry breathed. Her eyes flickered up to Joyce and she suddenly grabbed her hand. Joyce felt an electric surge through her body. She suddenly saw an image of Eleven standing on her porch. "No!"

Joyce took a moment to absorb the shock of what had just happened. She had seen a lot of strange things in the past week and had pulled her son that everyone thought was dead from another dimension through a portal. "No? You mean that little girl isn't Jane?"

"No."

Joyce looked over at Hopper. Becky stood next to him with a look of utter shock on her face. Terry grabbed Joyce's hand again. She experienced a sensation of falling, then saw an image of Brenner taking a newborn baby. The image was oddly familiar. Joyce suddenly fell onto the floor and Hopper was at her side.

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Nancy hadn't checked the in basement when she stopped at her home that morning before she and Jonathan went into town to pick up supplies. Her mother had told her that Mike was in the basement with his friends. Nancy had decided against checking on them as she didn't want to risk rousing any suspicion.

She and Jonathan bought hunting supplies at the local army good store before going to Radio Shack to get some recording devices. The store manager, Bob Newby answered their questions about the recording devices. He offered his condolences to Jonathan about Will (he'd volunteered in the search party earlier that week), and he told Nancy that he hoped Barb was safe.

Nancy politely thanked Bob as she tried to hide how upset she was knowing that Barb was dead. He reminded herself, that she would at least be able to give Barb's parents closure. "Did we bring enough money to buy this stuff?" Nancy asked Jonathan. She started pulling money from her pockets and Jonathan did the same.

"I can help with that," said Steve startling both Nancy and Jonathan.

"Steve! I-I.." Nancy stuttered.

"You're just hunting some inter-dimensional monster," said Steve as he significantly lowered his voice. "Oh and trying to expose the people who let it out."

"What?" said Nancy and Jonathan in unison.

"I guess you're wondering how I know," said Steve. Jonathan stared in confusion while Nancy nodded.

"You're brother's friends were in the woods behind my house last night doing a little monster hunting of their own. I saw it, I saw the thing that took Barb."

Nancy bit her lip and looked away for a moment. "Steve, it's dangerous."

"I know," said Steve. "I want to help. We can't save Barb, but at least we can keep Jonathan's brother safe from the assholes at the lab."

"You know about that?" asked Jonathan.

"Yeah, those two little shits made me swear the most excellent promise before they talked. I owe you. Sorry about your camera, by the way. That was a shitty thing to do," said Steve. Jonathan shoved his hands in his pockets and stared at the floor. "From what they told me, it sounds like there's a lot of work to do, so we should get started.

Steve paid for the recorder and disposable camera and they headed out to Jonathan's car deciding to wait until they were somewhere less public.

"Hey Nancy, can't wait to see your movie. Are the stalker and the sap here gonna make an appearance?" said one of the seniors as he drove by. Nancy exchanged a confused look with Jonathan and Steve. She then headed toward the movie theater. Someone had spray painted "Nancy the Slut Wheeler" on the marquee.

"What the hell!" said Jonathan

"Tommy, it has to be," said Steve through gritted teeth. They heard Tommy and Carol's distinctly obnoxious laughter in the alley. Steve headed down the alley.

"Steve, wait!" said Nancy. She hesitated, glanced at Jonathan, and followed Steve. Tommy was painting the words "Byers is a pervert" on the door next to the words "Harrington is a little bitch."

Steve grabbed Tommy by his collar and shoved him against the wall. "What the hell is the matter with you?"

"Did I hit a nerve, Stevie boy?" asked Tommy. "Well, is it isn't the leading lady and the stalker." Jonathan had decided to follow Nancy. "They've been seen all over the place together in the last couple days. Are you really that gullible, Harrington?"

"The only gullible thing I've done was be friends with you," said Steve.

"Hey there, Byers. These two your next victims. I bet you got a real taste for blood after you killed your brother."

"Shut-UP, Tommy," said Steve.

"You know Byers, with that crazy mother you've got, you probably did your brother a favor by turning him into worm food," said Tommy.

Jonathan rushed forward, knocked Tommy out of Steve's grasp and to the ground and began punching him as hard as he could. Steve tried to break up the fight, but got hit in the face by Tommy. Officers Callahan and Powell came to break up the fight, but Jonathan accidentally elbowed Callahan in the face. Tommy and Carol ran away while Steve and Jonathan were put into handcuffs.

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It took Eleven a couple hours to find Will as she had to walk on some difficult paths. He was unconscious next to a tree. He looked really pale. dried blood was caked around his nose. Eleven brushed his cheek (which was cold and clammy) and felt his forehead (which was hot). The restraints on his hands brought back scary memories for her. The latches that locked them were very complicated and it would take a couple minutes for her to picture how they worked for her to get them off of Will.

"Will, wake up," said Eleven as she gently shook Will's shoulder. It took a minute, but Will finally let out a small moan. His eyelids opened just a little. He vaguely looked at Eleven. He winced as she pulled the duct tape off of his mouth.

"Mom?" said Will hoarsely as he blinked in confusion. He closed his eyes and rubbed them with his forearm. He then looked at Eleven again. "El? The bad people are coming. They were going to take me to the lab, but the demogorgan got them, We have to get out of here." Tears started to form in Will's eyes.

Eleven reached over and hugged Will. He returned the hug and she felt him violently shivering as she tried to picture how to unlock the restraints in her mind. Mike's voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Let him go! LET HIM GO!" Eleven and Will both looked in the direction of Mike's panicked voice.

"That's Mike," said Will. "He's in danger. You have to help him, El."

"TLL CUT HIM RIGHT NOW!"

"All right, just hold on. HOLD ON!"

"Mike! Don't do it! I don't need my baby teeth, Mike!"

"El, hurry!" said Will. Eleven glanced at the restraints. "I'm not going anywhere. Please, help them."

Eleven nodded and followed the voices. Will leaned against the trees and silently prayed the Eleven got there on time. She didn't know what try was doing to his friends, but it couldn't be good. Troy was dangerous.

"Yeah, that's right, you'd better run! She's our friend and she's crazy! Do you hear me? She'll kill you sons of bitches!" Will breathed a sigh of relief as he heard Dustin's words. That had to mean that Eleven had saved them. He tried to wiggle his fingers, but the restraints didn't allow movement. He wanted to scream to get him out of those things, but forced himself to remain quiet. There were a lot of people he did not want to encounter and they could be nearby. Eleven was probably catching her breath from doing whatever she did to chase Troy away.

"El!" said Mike as he gently shook her shoulder. Eleven opened her eyes after about three minutes.

"Mike!" she breathed. She sat up and hugged him. Dustin joined in on the hug. Eleven was momentarily disoriented. She suddenly remember that Will was trapped. "Will."

"Did you find him?" asked Mike as he pulled back from the hug. Eleven nodded and pointed in the direction where Will was trapped. She trembled as Mike helped her to her feet. She didn't feel like standing up and walking, but wanted to free Will as soon as possible. He'd already been stuck there for several hours.

Eleven's legs shook as she took her first couple of steps. Mike and Dustin took her arms to help her, but she quickly steadied herself and picked up the pace and walked ahead of them.

Mike and Dustin were both relieved and stunned when they saw Will. He was sitting on his knees, and leaning forward with his forehead on the tree trunk.

"Will!" Mike called. Will blinked and looked up and Mike and Dustin ran to his side and knelt beside him.

"Holy shit! What happened to you?" asked Dustin.

"Th-they caught me," said Will as tears started pouring down his face. Mike hugged him and Dustin joined in, repeating their actions with Eleven a few minutes earlier.

"Who caught you?" asked Mike gently.

"The bad people from the lab," said Will. "But the demogorgan got them. They're looking for El and they were looking for me too. They know about me. The put me in these-" Will held up his hands to show the restraints. "-before the demogorgan got them, I tried to stay invisible as long as I could, but I passed out."

"It's okay. It's okay, Will. We'll get you home. They won't get you." Mike looked at Eleven who had just knelt beside him. "They won't get either of you."

"El, can you get those things off Will?" asked Dustin.

"Yes," said Eleven, She put her hands on the restraints.

"El, wait," said Will. "Whatever you just did to save Dustin and Lucas probably drained you. You need to rest."

"Will, it's okay," said Eleven. She closed over eyes. Her nose started to bleed a little, but after a minute, the three boys heard the sounds of latches clicking in the dome shapes of the restraints. After another minute, they opened up and fell to the ground with a heavy thud. Will's hands and fingers were stiff from being stuck in those restraints for several hours and they started to tremble violently.

Mike took one of Will's trembling hands into his own and started to gently message it. "What happened, Will? Why did you wander off last night?"

"I don't know," said Will. "I-I don't even remember wandering off. I just remember thinking I was putting everyone in danger and that your family wouldn't be safe if I stayed. I was suddenly out here and couldn't remember how I got here. Then the bad people showed up."

"You're not the one putting us in danger, Will. It's the bad people," said Mike. He hugged Will again. "We're all sticking together, got it?" Mike felt Will's chin lightly bounce on his shoulder as he nodded.

"Where's Lucas?" asked Will.

"He's looking for you," said Dustin. "We'll contact him, don't worry."

"C'mon, let's get you home," said Mike as he helped Will to his feet. Will's legs shook as he stood up, just as Eleven's had minutes earlier. "You both need to rest. We should probably think of a place where we can escape, just in case the bad people show up at my house."

"Do you think they will?" asked Will.

"Probably not," said Mike. "But we should be ready for anything."

Dustin picked up the restraints and untangled them from the tree. "What are you doing with those?" asked Will.

"Evidence," said Dustin as though stating the obvious. "Nancy wants to expose those assholes at the lab, this could help. It's back up the story that they kidnapped you and faked your death, so you won't have to hide anymore."

The four children walked back to Mike's house, deciding to go through the woods to decrease the chances of anyone seeing Eleven or Will.

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AN: Because the characters have access to information they didn't have at this point in the show, similar events are taking place a little earlier than they did on the show. It's still morning when Mike and Dustin run into Troy and James, as opposed to late afternoon, like on the show.

Tommy is doing the spray painting on the movie theater because he's a jerk. Steve had the audacity to stand up to him, so he's getting revenge because he's an entitled jerk.

7. Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Mike got a bowl of warm water and epsom salt from the bathroom. "Here, soak your hands in this, Will." Will complied.

Mike took a damp cloth and wiped some of the grime off his face. Will was well aware that Eleven and Dustin were watching him with concern. He stared at his hands.

"Will? Do you think that whatever it was in the Upside Down...Do you think it made you sleep walk or something last night?" asked Mike. Will looked at him sharply. Fear and realization filled his eyes.

"I thought about it, but I hoped I was wrong. What does it want with me?"

"I don't know, but it won't get you," said Mike.

"We'll figure something out," said Dustin.

Mike went upstairs to grab some bread and meat for sandwiches. His mother was cooking soup in the crock pot. He noticed that it was on warm. That meant that it was ready. He grabbed a couple of thermoses and bowls and spoons. He had a feeling that Will was getting sick. The soup was the only thing he could think of that would help.

Mike tried to contact Lucas on the supercom, but had no luck. As the four of them ate their lunch down stairs, Will slowly ate his soup, but was more thirsty. Mike considered taking Eleven and Dustin aside to tell them what he was about to say, but decided he didn't want to say anything behind Will's back. He'd been through a lot that week and deserved honesty. It was something they'd promised each other since the beginning of their friendship.

"Listen, guys, we have to make sure Will isn't left alone. Someone should stay awake and keep watch if this whole-whatever's going on-isn't over tonight."

Will looked up. He seemed taken aback for a moment and opened his mouth to say something, then just sighed and continued to stare at the floor. Mike gave his shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

"Something's going on and there's more than one bad thing out there. We have to be ready."

"I know," said Will. "I just want it to be over."

"Me too," said Eleven.

"It will be," said Dustin. "We should be hearing from your mom and brother soon. Are you going to feel up to making that portal in the library?"

"I think so," said Will

"You'd better get some sleep, Will," said Mike. Will looked for a brief moment like he was going to protest then just sighed and nodded.

Dustin volunteered to take the first watch. Will drifted off to sleep fairly quickly all things considered. Mike decided to help Eleven get cleaned up. She had gotten some grime on her face between saving Mike from plummeting to his death and finding Will and releasing him from the restraints.

"Mike?"

"Yes?"

"What are we going to do about the mouth breathers. They..they know about me."

"We'll think of something. We'll have to think about a lot of things today."

"They aren't our friends."

"No, they aren't... but if they do anything, maybe no one will believe them... El?"

"Yes?"

"I'm really glad you're here... that we found you. I mean, I wish that Will didn't have to get stuck in the Upside Down for four days, but I'm glad you're here..."

"Me too," said Eleven with a small smile.

"Whenever this... this whole situation-whatever it is-whenver it's over.. Maybe you could stay with us. With my family. This could be your new home."

"Home," said Eleven serenely.

"Yeah, and you could come to the Snow Ball with me," Mike blurted out. His stomach suddenly felt like someone had dumped a bucket of ice in it. He had never had the nerve to ask a girl to a dance.

"Snowball?" asked Eleven.

"It's this really cheesy school dance. My friends and I just kinda sat in the corner all night last year, but maybe things can be different this year..."

Mike wasn't sure what caused him to do it, but he was suddenly kissing Eleven. He slowly pulled away and was relieved to see that Eleven didn't look completely disgusted. She seemed pleasantly surprised.

They both sat in silence for a minute. Eleven seemed to be having some sort of internal debate. Before Mike knew it, Eleven was leaning in and kissing him. It was extremely awkward as neither of them know what they were doing, but Mike felt elation for the first time in days.

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"Are you alright, Joyce?" asked Hopper as he rubbed between her shoulder blades while she sat in the passenger seat with her face in her hands.

"I need to see Will," said Joyce. "Is there somewhere we can take him until it's time to go to the library tonight?"

"Maybe," said Hopper.

"What she showed me... it's just felt so familiar...Who knows how many children they've stolen."

"We're going to expose those bastards. They won't get Will."

"Chief, come in chief," said Callahan over the radio.

"I don't have time right now," said Hopper.

"There's been a fight-"

"So file a report-"

"It's Jonathan Byers. We can't find Joyce, have you seen her?"

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Lucas sat outside of Hawkins Lab debating whether or not he should try to sneak in to try to find Will. He saw some agents dressed at utility workers approaching some vans... vans just like the one he'd seen near his home that morning. He couldn't make out everything they were saying, but heard the words, Byers boy, test subject Eleven, foot prints, and Wheeler home. Lucas got on his bike and started peddling as fast as he could.

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Dustin was reading one of Mike's X-Men comics and looking over at a sleeping Will every time he turned the page. He heard the muffled voices of Mike and Eleven in the bathroom, but couldn't make out what they were saying. The supercom suddenly started to crackle. He could hear Lucas's voice, but there was too much distortion to understand what he was saying.

"Lucas, I can hear you, but I can't understand what you're saying, over," said Dustin as he picked up the supercom.

Lucas was shouting some more. It sounded like an emergency. Will woke up and looked around. "Lucas?"

"He's trying to tell us something, but he's out of range," said Dustin. Will sat up and opened his book bag. He'd forgotten to bring his own supercom. "I'll get Mike."

Dustin ran over to the bathroom and pushed the door open. Mike and Eleven were startled and pulled apart. "Mike, Lucas is trying to contact us, but he's too far out of range."

Mike grabbed his own supercom and tried to tune in Lucas. The group was finally able to make out the words "The bad men are coming."

"Will, El," wait down here. Mike ran upstairs followed by Dustin. Will grabbed his things and stuffed them in his backpack.

"El, is there anything you had before you came here that's in this basement?" asked Will. Eleven looked around. She went over to the laundry and grabbed the yellow tee shirt Benny had given her, as well as the pink dress that belonged to Nancy (she had changed into a turquoise pair of overalls Nancy had given her). She stuffed the clothes into Will's backpack as he held it open for her. "See if you can get this back on." Will grabbed Mike's grandmother's wig and handed it to Eleven. She placed it snugly on her head.

"If anyone asks where I am, I've left the country!" Will and Eleven looked up in the direction of Mike's voice. Seconds later, Mike and Dustin came running down the stairs.

"Let's go, there are a bunch of vans outside," said Mike to Will and Eleven as he and Dustin grabbed their backpacks. They ran out the back door. Mike and Dustin grabbed their bikes. Will found himself missing his own bike as he ran along side his friends. Dustin took off his hat and handed it to Will.

"Just in case." Will took the hat and adjusted it to compensate for his lack of curls.

"The bad men are coming, do you copy?" said Lucas over the supercom.

"We copy!" said Dustin. "They're already here."

"Meet me at the corner of Elm and Cherry," said Lucas.

"Copy the, Elm and Cherry," said Dustin. They started heading toward their meeting point when a couple of agents came around the corner of the house. The four party members froze then turned to run the other way when two more agents came around the other side of the house.

"SHIT!" Dustin exclaimed.

"It's them, it's both of them," said one of the agents. He grabbed the radio off his belt, but Eleven screamed and threw all four agents against the side of the house, knocking them out. Mike, Will and Dustin stood there in stunned silence.

"Get Eleven out of here, I'll stall them," said Will.

"What?" said Mike. "No way, we're not leaving you."

"You have to, they're coming."

"No, this is non-negotiable!"

"Will," said Eleven. She wordlessly sent an image from the lab into Will's mind. His eyes widened and he nodded. They ran behind the Blackburn home and jumped on their bikes with Eleven jumping on the back of Mike's bike and Will jumping on the back of Dustin's. There was a bump on the sidewalk that caused both bikes to turn over spilling all four children into the street. A car skidded loudly to a stop catching the attention of the scientists in the vans.

Eleven looked up to lock eyes with Papa.

"Hey are you kids alright?" asked the owner of the car as he got out. Will pulled Dustin's hat down more to cover his.

"Let's get out of here," said Mike. They all scrambled to their feet and hopped on the bikes. They rode down the hills behind the houses and met Lucas.

"I think we lost them," said Dustin breathlessly. The vans came around the corner.

"Go! Go! Go!" Mike yelled. They peddled as fast as they could, but were cut off by another van. It all happened so fast, that none of the boys even had the time to shout to the others to turn the corner. The van that was coming at them suddenly flipped through the air and landed on the other side of them, blocking the rest of the vans.

Brenner got out and watched the children peddling off and disappearing around the corner. "What do we do now?" asked Connie. "The Byers boy was with them too."

"We question the Wheeler boy's parents. Try to find out where they may have gone."

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The party members didn't stop until they reached the junk yard.

"Did you guys see what she did to that van?" asked Dustin.

"No, Dustin, we missed it," said Mike as he helped Eleven off his bike.

"I mean, that was -"

"Awesome, it was awesome," said Lucas. He walked over to Eleven and put his hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry about this morning, I was just worried about Will... But that no excuse, after everything you've done for us.." Lucas looked over at Will. "Are you alright, Will? What happened, why did you wander off last night?"

Will shoved his hands in his pockets and stared at the ground. "Sorry about that. I don't know. I just remember thinking I was somehow putting everyone in danger and the next thing I knew, I was in the middle of the woods...and, and agents from the lab caught me, but the demogorgan got them."

"They know about him," said Dustin. He pulled the restraints from his backpack.

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"Alright, we've got to go get your brother and the girl and get them somewhere safe," said Hopper as he took the handcuffs of of

Jonathan and Steve.

"Is the library plan still on?" asked Nancy.

"Yes," said Hopper. "We should work on the cover story we're going to use to expose those bastards at the lab."

"A cover story? What about the truth?" said Nancy.

"The public isn't going to but the whole truth," said Hopper. "We need this story to stick for everyone's sake."

"I want an apology!" a woman's voice carried into Hopper's office.

"Load those supplies into your mother's car, I'll take care of this," said Hopper. Joyce glanced out at the source of the voice.

"That's one of the boys who's always bullying Will and his friends."

"Oh really?" said Hopper. "I'll take care of this, get those supplies loaded."

It turned out to be a good thing that Hopper decided to question Troy. The kid had seen Eleven, Mike, and Dustin, but didn't mention Lucas or Will. He managed to convince Troy to keep quiet about Eleven's abilities when the bully accidentally admitted to chasing Mike and Dustin with a knife and forcing Mike to jump off a cliff. His mother suddenly wasn't interested in pressing charges against the mystery girl who had broken her son's arm.

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"What kind of sick game are you people playing?" asked Karen angrily. "We were just at Will's funeral yesterday. My son was devastated when they found the body and now you're saying my son's been hiding his dead friend and some girl in my basement?"

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"Joyce, Nancy, wait," said Hopper.

"We have to get them away from those people," said Joyce as she

indicated the vans and military cars surrounding the Wheeler home.

"They don't have them," said Hopper.

"How do you know?" asked Jonathan. Hopper pointed at the Helicopters flying overhead.

"Everyone get back on the car. We need to find them before the feds do," said Hopper. Steve, Jonathan, Nancy, and Joyce all complied. "Can you think of anywhere they might have gone."

"Castle Byers, maybe" said Joyce.

"Did Will take his supercom to Mike's?" asked Jonathan.

"I don't know," said Joyce.

"If he left it at home, we can use it to try to contact them. They take those things everywhere," said Jonathan.

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"Shit!" Dustin exclaimed as helicopters started flying overhead.

"Everyone on the bus," said Mike. They stashed their bikes under the bus and darted inside.

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"I got it," said Joyce as she grabbed Will's supercom from under his bed and handed it to Nancy.

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"Mike? Mike, are you there? It's an emergency.!" said Nancy. Lucas reached for Mike's supercom.

"Don't answer that," said Mike as he grabbed the supercom.

"She said it's an emergency!" said Lucas.

"What if it's a trap? What if the bad people have her and they're making her say this?" asked Mike.

"Lando!" said Dustin. "Don't answer!"

Eleven suddenly closed her eyes and grabbed Will's wrist. Will's eyes briefly became unfocused, then focused again. "You can answer Mike. The bad people aren't with them."

"Nancy?"

"Mike, thank God! Where are you?"

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"I'll go get them," said Hopper. "We have to get everyone somewhere Hawkins Lab doesn't know about though."

"Where do you have in mind?" asked Joyce.

"My grandfather's old cabin in the woods near Pawnee," said Hopper. "Get yourselves out there. I'll pick up the kids and meet you there as soon as possible."

"How do we get there?" asked Jonathan.

"Drop me off at the police station so I can get my truck and I'll tell you on the way."

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"What's taking so long?" asked Dustin as he paced back and forth.

"Maybe Hopper has to make sure he isn't being followed," said Will.

"I don't like this. I don't like this at all."

"Did you guys hear that?" asked Mike. They five children went silent.

"Wasn't the chief coming by himself?" asked Lucas in a whisper. "That sounds like more than one person."

"Everybody take my hands," said Will as he held his arms out. Mike and Eleven each took at hand while Dustin and Lucas each grabbed an elbow. Will closed his eyes and concentrated with all of his energy. The five of them became invisible just before one of the

Hawkins agents entered the bus.

The agent didn't get very far as someone knocked him out from behind. "What the-" the other agent started to say before he was knocked out as well. Hopper came onto the bus and looked around for the party members.

Will started to tremble. He let go of Mike and Eleven's hands and fell forward making everyone visible to Hopper's eyes. Will vomited a good portion of the lunch he'd eaten earlier that day. Blood was pouring from his nostrils and mixed with the vomit.

"Will!" said Mike, Eleven, Lucas, and Dustin all at once.

"Oh Jesus!" said Hopper as he rushed to Will's side. He put a hand on Will's back, meaning to comfort the boy, but only startled him. Will fell onto his back and started to crawl away backward. He had a terrified expression on his face, then realized that it was Hopper and not the Hawkins Lab agent. He took a few calming breaths. Hopper slowly approached him.

"It's alright, Will. I'm going to get you to your mother and brother," said Hopper. He felt Will's forehead and cheeks. "You're burning up." He picked Will up and cradled him in his arms. Memories of Sarah came rushing to his head as he glanced at Eleven, who was still wearing the blonde wig.

"Alright, let's get out of here," Hopper said to the kids. None of them moved. "LET'S GO!" They all scrambled to their feet. Mike grabbed Will's back pack as well and his own.

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Joyce, Jonathan, and Nancy all ran outside when they saw Hopper's truck pull up. Steve unpacked some of the food he'd picked up at his house for everyone.

"Will!" Joyce called as she and Jonathan ran to the truck. She started sobbing as she pulled him into a tight embrace. Jonathan threw his arms around the two of them. Eleven felt something warm in her stomach as she watched the three Byers hugging. "Thank God, you're

alright," said Joyce. "What happened?"

"They're after me, Mom, the bad people. They tried to get me."

"They won't get you, Baby. I will never let that happen." Joyce looked over Will's shoulder and saw Eleven watching them. "Hey, sweetheart, are you alright?" Eleven nodded.

"Let's get inside," said Hopper. Everyone complied. Joyce felt Will's head.

"Do you have any aspirin, Hop?"

"I picked some up when we stopped at my house," said Steve. He grabbed a bottle of aspirin out of his bag, as well as a can of pop.

"Thank you," said Joyce. "Here, Will Baby, take this. We need to get that fever down." She reached over and felt Eleven's forehead. "Looks like you should take some too."

"Sorry about the mess, everyone. I mainly use this place for storage," said Hopper.

"That's alright," said Nancy. "It's a good place to hide for a few hours until we get Barb's body back and expose those assholes who killed her and want to take these two-" Nancy indicated Will and Eleven- "as prisoners."

"Maybe we should wait until tomorrow," said Hopper. "I don't think Will's in any condition to make a portal to another dimension."

"I can do it," said Will. "I have to."

"You were just vomiting blood half an hour ago, Will," said Hopper.

"What?" exclaimed Joyce.

"That doesn't matter," said Will. "If we wait until tomorrow, they might find us. We have to do it tonight."

"I can help," said Eleven.

"You aren't exactly in great condition either, young lady," said Hopper.

"She's probably pretty drained after flipping the van with her mind," said Dustin. "It was pretty awesome, but had to be draining."

"I can help," Eleven repeated. She walked over to Will and grabbed his hand. She closed her eyes and Will's became unfocused for a brief moment.

"That's it," said Will. "I just have to open the portal. Eleven can use her powers to make it bigger."

"Will," said Joyce. "I don't want either of you to hurt yourselves."

"It'll be okay, Mom. The people after us are probably willing to kill everyone here to get us. We can't wait."

"He's right," said Hopper. "They killed Benny. Alright, you two," he pointed at Will and Eleven. "Get some rest. The rest of us will work on the plan and the cover story."

8. Chapter 8

Chapter 8

"We've got something to back the story up," said Dustin.

"They faked Will's death and forged Mom's signature on the death certificate," said Jonathan. "What more evidence do we need?"

"Probably all the evidence we can get," said Nancy.

"Exactly," said Dustin. He pulled the pair of restraints from his backpack. Will, who had been resting on an improvised bed made from old jackets provided by Hopper (with Chester sitting protectively next to him), sat up in alarm. He didn't want his mother to know what had happened as she was already worried enough and didn't want him to try to open the portal as it was. He and Eleven, who was resting on her own improvised bed exchanged a nervous glance.

"What are those?" asked Hopper as he took them from Dustin. Will stared at his hands. Lucas had freaked out when they told him about the Hawkins Lab agents trying to capture Will while the party hid on the bus. His mother and brother were likely to freak out even more.

"They're the restraints agents put on Will last night when they tried to kidnap him before the demogorgan got them," said Dustin. He didn't see Will's pleading look.

"What?" Joyce, Jonathan, Hopper, and Nancy exclaimed in unison.

"Were the agents or the monsters at our house?" asked Nancy

"No, it wasn't like that," said Mike. "It, it..." He was at a loss for words.

"It was my fault," said Will.

"It wasn't your fault," said Mike. "You didn't cause it."

"Yes I did. I shouldn't have left your house."

"You were sleepwalking. It was whatever that thing you saw in the Upside Down," said Mike.

"Sleepwalking?" asked Joyce as she walked over to Will, knelt down, and wrapped her arms protectively around him. "And what thing did you see in that place. What exactly happened last night?"

Tears began to cascade from Will's eyes. It was a common occurrence in the past week. "I don't know. There was something else in the Upside Down... something worse than the demogorgan. It's trying to get me, control me or something. I just remember thinking last night that I was putting everyone at Mike's house in danger while being there, so I just left, even though I wasn't awake. Suddenly I was aware that I wasn't at Mike's house anymore. I was in the woods. A couple of Hawkins Agents found me. They put me in those restraints. They were looking for El too. They were going to take me back to the lab, but the demogorgan got them. I couldn't get out of the restraints, so I stayed invisible as long as I could, but I passed out and they next thing I knew El had found me."

"So that's why Troy saw you this afternoon. He was makin' a report at the station," said Hopper. "Said El here broke his arm!"

"He was holding a knife to Dustin's throat and made me jump off a cliff," said Mike. "I would have died if El hadn't saved me."

"Don't worry about that," said Hopper. "I'll take care of it."

"Maybe we should just leave town.. Hide somewhere," said Joyce. "These people are more dangerous than we thought."

"Screw that," said Nancy. "Why should you have to hide anywhere? We're going to expose those assholes and take them down. They aren't getting away with killing Barb and Benny. They won't get away with what they did to Will and Eleven and God know how many other kids either."

"Nancy's right, mom," said Will as he wiped his eyes. "We have to stop them."

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The group parked their cars (with the exception of the police truck) at the middle school and high school and walked to the library. It was a good thing that they had four adventurous boys with very active imaginations in their numbers. Mike, Will, Dustin, and Lucas had played several games sneaking around town over the years and had spent a lot of time avoiding bullies. It was 10:30 and the only people in downtown Hawkins were catching the last show at the movie theater.

They began setting up when they got to the library. Being the chief of police, Hopper had a spare key to every publicly owned building in Hawkins. They had flamethrowers and traps in case the demogorgan made an appearance. They planned on putting her in the police truck once they had Barb's body back. Hopper had gotten some hazard suits and a body bag from the coroner's office. He, Jonathan, and Steve put them on as Will went to the wall closest to the place where Barb was in the Upside Down.

Will focused his thoughts on keeping everyone safe for the human and inter-dimensional he'd learned about in the past week. He felt an intense fear for a moment as he remember the terror he'd felt being trapped in that place. What if he got trapped there again? What if everyone else got trapped with him? That wouldn't happen was what Will told himself. He was with a group of people who could do anything. They had to stop the bad men and this was the only way.

Will focused on opening the portal. He felt the blood start to trickle from his nose. The concrete on the wall slowly became a membrane. He felt Eleven's hand on his shoulder and looked up. She nodded and he backed up several paces, not wanting to be anywhere near that horrible place again.

Will slowly sank to the floor as he watched Eleven opening the portal until it was big enough for Hopper, Jonathan, and Steve to walk through. The rotting stench of his former prison hit him hard and the memories flooded into his brain. He wanted to tell Eleven to just close it. He wanted to look away, but he couldn't because he feared that anyone on the people in the room could get trapped in that place.

Joyce knelt next to Will and wrapped her arms around him. "It's

alright. You did good, Baby. It's almost over." Will looked up to see Mike giving him a reassuring smile.

When the portal was large enough, Eleven stepped back and stood next to Mike. "Hurry," said Will to Jonathan as he stepped though with Hopper and Steve. They had to pry Barb from the slimy substance of the Upside Down. Nancy started to sob and Mike walked over and hugged her. He had felt the exact same way when they saw Will's fake body three days earlier. It took about ten minutes, but they got her out.

Hopper, Jonathan, and Steve took off their bio suits and put them into garbage bags as Eleven closed the portal.

"Okay, let's get out of here," said Hopper. They were planning on going to the police station and making some calls saying they'd found Will and Barb near the lab. Hopper opened the door just a crack to make sure the coast was clear. Five Hawkins Lab agents and Brenner jumped into view.

"Freeze!" shouted one of the men. Hopper slammed the door shut.

"Shit! What do we do now?" asked Dustin.

"Get Barb," said Nancy to Steve and Jonathan as she heard the agents breaking down the door. "We have to hide!" She pointed to the reference section. Steven and Jonathan grabbed the body and everyone ducked behind the shelves. They began to get their weapons ready.

The group heard the doors crash open. "Eleven," Dr. Brenner called. "It's time to come home. No one else needs to get hurt." Mike looked at Eleven and frantically shook his head.

"Will," said Dr. Brenner. "I know you don't want your friends and family to get hurt. You can save them. The world thinks you're dead anyway." Joyce tightened her grip on Will. He looked at the wall. Their cars were at the school. He could make a portal there. They needed a distraction and the demogorgan made itself useful at that very moment. It suddenly pushed through the wall. The agents turned and started shooting, but their bullets were ineffective.

Will quickly wiggled out of his mother's grasp, put his hands on the wall and focused on the main hallway of Hawkins Middle. The portal began to appear and Eleven put her hand on his shoulder. He shuffled back as she made the hole bigger.

"Everyone, go through," said Will.

"You two first," said Hopper as he pointed to Will and Eleven. They crawled through, followed by Mike, Lucas, and Dustin. Then Joyce and Nancy went through and Hopper, Steve, and Jonathan dragged the body bag containing Barb. Eleven quickly closed the portal.

"Holy shit!" said Dustin. "Good thinking Will the Wise."

Will sat on the floor, wiped blood from his nose, and rested his forehead on the wall as he panted. The wall felt nice and cool. His heartbeat was painfully rapid and he began to rub his chest. Eleven wiped the blood from her own nose as she rested her head on Mike's shoulder. She felt bad for Will as she remember how sick she felt when she first learned how to use her own powers.

"Hey, Bud, you alright?" asked Jonathan as he and Joyce knelt beside Will. Joyce began to caress Will's forehead as he nodded. Mike was worried about his friend and how using his new found abilities was affecting him. He seemed to be getting sick and likely needed to go to the hospital, but was that even safe at the moment?

"Let's see if the coast is clear to get out of here," said Hopper to Steve and Jonathan. "For now, let's move the body into that mop closet to be safe."

Nancy, Jonathan, and Steve all pulled the body bag into the closet. Nancy wiped tears from her eyes as the reality that her best friend was dead hit her harder and harder. She decided to follow Hopper and the boys out to check to see if the coast was clear.

"Let's get you two cleaned up," said Joyce. she helped Will to his feet and took Eleven's hand. She then led them both into the closest classroom, which happened to have a sink and cleaned their faces while Mike, Dustin, and Lucas waited in the hall.

"Will doesn't look so good," said Lucas in a low voice. "Do you think he'll be alright?"

"He'll be fine," said Dustin in a voice like he was trying to convince himself. "He's been through a lot, he just needs to rest."

Mike remained quiet as he stared at the doorway. He wondered if they'd really be able to get out of their predicament.

Will sat on the floor and leaned against the wall. They were in the art classroom. He noticed some of his old drawings on the wall as a memorial had been made for him by Mrs. Johnson. He wondered how people would react when they found out he was alive. There were a few classmates outside of the party who had always been nice to him, but most of Hawkins middle school either ignored him and his friends or went out of their way to make the party members' lives miserable.

Will watched as his mother helped Eleven clean herself up. He wondered if Eleven would be able to go to school with them when everything was over. Will certainly hoped so. She had helped his friends find him. She had been raised by evil people, yet her instinct was to do good. To Will, that made her a good person. His mother was a good person too. So many people in Hawkins saw her as crazy and treated her poorly. That made Will resent the town even more.

"Everything you've been through must have been scary," said Joyce to Eleven. "But you've been so brave. You saved my son. I'm going to do whatever I can to help you from now on."

"Thank you," said Eleven.

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"Freeze!" said Connie as she and four other agents pointed their guns at Hopper, Jonathan, Nancy and Steve. One Agent pulled out a radio.

"We've got the chief and the teenagers at the school, Dr. Brenner. The kids can't be far!"

"On our way," said Dr. Brenner.

"Where are the twins?" Connie asked Hopper.

"Twins?" asked Hopper.

"Don't play dumb," said Connie. "The Byers twins. You've been hiding test subject Eleven and her brother. Where are they?"

"What?" said a stunned Jonathan as he processed the new information, though unsure of what he had just heard. "You're not getting anywhere near them."

"Maybe we can strike a deal?" said the brown haired agent to Hopper. "You give us the Byers kids and we'll give you Sarah."

"You've had my daughter all these years?" asked Hopper. "Did you fake her death just like you faked Will's death."

"If she'd simply gone missing, you would have looked for her," said Connie. Hopper flew into a fit of rage, punching the five Hawkins Lab agents before they knew what hit them.

"RUN!" he shouted to the teenagers. They complied as the agents overpowered Hopper.

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"Someone's coming," said Mike as he entered the classroom followed by Dustin and Lucas. "I think they're with Brenner. Joyce went over to the window to see if they could open it. She saw cars and agents outside. She then walked to the door and heard faint footsteps from the east side of the building, but nothing from the west.

"Go that way," said Joyce to the kids. "Find some place to hide or get out of the building without being seen I'll hold them off."

"No, mom, you can't, they're evil," said Will.

"That's why they aren't getting their hands on you, now go! Quickly!" said Joyce. The five kids complied. Joyce grabbed one of the chairs. Two agents walked past the door and Joyce jumped out and hit them as hard as she could with the chair. They were temporarily stunned, but quickly overpowered her.

She was taken to the principal's office and tied to a chair. Hopper was in the nurse's office. Brenner entered. The agents who had been with him in the library were conspicuously absent. He glanced at Joyce, then down to the nurse's office.

"Get what you can out of them. We'll find the children. They can't have gone far," said Dr. Brenner.

"You leave them alone!" said Joyce.

"We'll do them no harm," said Brenner calmly as Connie and several others followed him.

"Look, we're right near the school speakers. You can call to your son, Mrs. Byers," said the agent who remained behind to interrogate Joyce.

"Go to hell!" said Joyce.

"Call to Will," said the agent as he held the microphone and pushed the button. Joyce held her mouth tightly shut and glared. The agent sighed and put the microphone down.

"It really is for the best, Mrs Byers. The world thinks he's dead anyway. This is for the greater good. He can help us fight our enemies, just like your daughter has."

"What?" asked Joyce. She remembered the vision Terry Ives had shown her. It wasn't Terry's memory, it was her own.

"We started watching you the day you had your accident at Hawkins Lab when you were fourteen. Your older son had potential, but your twins, we knew they had powers. You blacked out from pain killers when you gave birth to your daughter. It took so long for Will to be born that we just decided to leave him with you. We compensated your husband, of course. That money was meant to help your family, but he gambled it all away."

"You BASTARDS!" said Joyce. She managed to kick the agent hard enough that he fell to the ground. He slowly got up.

"I see you don't want to help us for the greater good," said the agent.

"How about a deal, you hand us the twins and don't give us trouble and we'll let your son Jonathan live."

"I know what you've done. You've stolen children from their parents. I saw what you did to Terry Ives. Do you really expect me to believe you won't hurt Jonathan if I cooperate?"

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"There's the door," said Lucas. "Let's go get help."

"Who can we go to?" asked Dustin. "Can we trust anyone?"

"I don't know," said Mike. "But we have to try."

Suddenly a small group of soldiers rounded the corner and stood between the party and the door. The 12 year olds pivoted and started running the opposite direction only to be cornered by a group of agents led by Connie. Eleven glared at them.

"She killed Benny," said Will as he remembered a memory Eleven had shown him.

"No one else needs to die if you and your sister cooperate, Mr. Byers," said Connie. Will exchanged a confused look with Eleven and his friends. Mike suddenly rushed forward.

"If you want to take them, you'll have to kill us!" said Mike.

"Yeah!" said Dustin as he rushed forward followed by Lucas.

"Eat shit!" said Lucas. The agents pointed their guns at the three boys defending their super powered friends. Eleven felt a surge of anger as the memory of Connie killing Benny became very fresh in her mind. She focused on the agents in front of her as well as the soldiers behind her. Blood started pouring from their eyes and they dropped to the ground: dead.

Eleven passed out and the four rushed to her side. "El!" Mike shouted. "She's not waking up!"

"We have to get her out of here," said Will. Suddenly the four boys

were seized by soldiers and pulled away from Eleven. Dr. Brenner walked past the group and motioned for the soldier holding Will to come forward as he picked up Eleven and cradled her.

"Let her go, you bastard!" said Mike as he struggled against the soldier restraining him.

"Eleven," said Dr. Brenner. "It's me, it's your Papa."

"Bad," Eleven moaned.

"You're sick. I'm going to take you home and make you well again," said Brenner. He looked over at Will. "You can have your brother for company from now on."

Will's eyes widened as he remembered the words from the agent who had captured him the night before. *Your sister's given us a lot of trouble.*

"The creature went looking for Eleven and it found *you*, Will," said Brenner. "It was created the day your mother had her accident. It was only natural that your sister was the one to make contact after all these years. It was only natural that it found you. We couldn't take you to the lab when you were born, but now you can fulfill your destiny."

"Screw you, psycho!" said Will. "Let us go!"

The lights suddenly started to violently flicker.

"Blood," said Mike. A portal formed in the wall as the demogorgan started to break through. Dr. Brenner let go of Eleven as the soldiers released the four boys and pointed their guns at the monster. Dustin picked up Eleven as the group ran to take cover. More soldiers approached them.

"Take my arms!" said Will. They all complied. Eleven reached over weakly and grabbed his shoulder. Will focused and they all became invisible.

"Where did they go?" asked one of the soldiers.

"We have to get the creature first," said another soldier.

Will led the group toward Mr. Clarke's room. He felt very dizzy and dropped to the floor when they were just a few feet away.

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The Demogorgan stopped short of ripping Brenner to shreds as it had done with everyone else it had run into who wasn't Joyce Byers or her children. It recognized it's creator and slowly backed away.

"You know what to do," said Brenner. "Find the boy and the girl."

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"Will? Will!" said Mike as he shook Will's shoulder. "He's not waking up! What's wrong with him."

"He's probably drained," said Lucas. "Let's get him in the classroom."

Mike reached through Will's armpits while Lucas grabbed his feet. When they got to the classroom, they set him on a table while Dustin placed Eleven on another table. Mike took off his jacket, folded it and stuck it under Will's head. He wasn't breathing and that frightened Mike.

"Mike," Eleven moaned. Mike went to her side and took her hand.

"It's okay. It'll all be over soon. You can be with your family and we can go to the Snow Ball," said Mike.

"Promise?" asked Eleven. Mike nodded. She looked over at Will. "Will, brother. Mrs. Byers, Mom. Jonathan, brother."

"He's okay, they're okay," said Mike. "They have to be."

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"Brenner has no intention of giving Sarah back, does he?" asked Hopper as he saw the agent preparing some sort of syringe.

"It didn't have to come to this, chief. We gave you a chance to walk

away, but you just had to stick your nose into things. You'll join your friend Benny soon."

WACK! Steve stood over the agent he'd just knocked out with a brick. He went over and untied Hopper. "You alright, Chief?"

"Yeah, thanks kid. Where are the others?" asked Hopper. They heard a similar wack and thud coming from the principal's office. Steve jerked his head in the direction.

"Jonathan's getting his mother and Nancy just called 9-11. I think she called a couple local TV station too. She really wants to expose these assholes."

Hopper followed Steve to the principal's office where Joyce was embracing Jonathan. The agent who was interrogating her was unconscious on the floor. Nancy entered the office.

"The agents and soldiers from the lab are all over the place. I heard the kids escaping when the demogorgan starting attacking."

"That thing's in the building?" asked Joyce. Nancy nodded.

"We have to find Will and the others," said Jonathan. "We should check Mr. Clarke's room and the AV room. That's where they're probably hiding."

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BANG! the classroom door crashed open. Lucas quickly grabbed his wrist rocket from his backpack. None of the boys had any fire making supplies. Steve and Jonathan had brought that stuff, so the wrist rocket was their best hope. Lucas began slinging the rocks at the monsters as Dustin and Mike shouted in panicked voices. When the forth rock hit, the demogorgan was thrown backward and pinned to the wall.

Eleven walked up from behind the three boys, her eyes focused on the monster. "Eleven, wait!" said Mike as he rushed forward. Eleven waved her arm and threw him back. He slid across the floor and to the back wall.

She now knew that Papa had created the monster. She couldn't let it hurt anyone else. She looked back at Will who was still unconscious. She couldn't let it hurt her mother or her brothers. She glanced at Dustin and Lucas. She couldn't let it hurt her friends. She glanced at Mike. "Goodbye, Mike." She turned to the demogorgan: Papa's monster. "No more."

Eleven raised her right hand and focused all her energy on destroying it.

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The adults and teenagers managed to evade the Hawkins soldiers and agents because most of them had been killed or severely injured. They heard Eleven's scream in the science classroom and rushed there just in time to see a flash of white light as Eleven and the monster vanished, leaving scorch marks on the wall and floating particles.

"Eleven!" called Mike, with tears running down his face. "El? El!"

"No! No! NO!" shouted Joyce as she rushed into the room and looked around frantically. She had just learned about her daughter who had been taken from her at birth. She couldn't lose her now. But El was gone. Joyce looked over to see Will lying unconscious on the table and ran over to him followed by Jonathan. "What happened?"

"He was making us invisible to get away from Brenner's people," said Lucas. "He just passed out."

"He's not breathing. Hopper, he's not breathing!"

"We're going to do CPR," said Hopper. He began to press on Will's chest and count. "Joyce, I'm going to need you to tilt his head back and pinch his nose. You're going to breath into his mouth, wait a second and do it again."

Joyce nodded. When Hopper counted to thirty, he nodded at Joyce who pinched Will's nose and breathed into his mouth.

"C'mon, kid, c'mon!" said Hopper as he pounded on Will's chest.

"C'mon, Will," said Dustin as he watched with Mike and Lucas. Will

suddenly gasped for breath. Joyce and Jonathan engulfed him in a hug. Will looked slightly dazed at first. He looked around taking note of who was in the room.

"Where's El?" he asked in a hoarse voice. No one answered. Will noticed the scorch marks on the wall. He looked at Mike, who was crying and the horrible reality set in.

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Jonathan carried Will out. They checked the mop closet to make sure Barb was still there on the way out. There were several ambulances outside. Nancy noticed a couple of news vans setting up their cameras. She broke away from the group and ran to the reporters.

"Miss, did you see what happened in there?" asked a female reporter as she held out a microphone to Nancy.

"It was Dr. Brenner from Hawkins Lab," said Nancy. "He and his people kidnapped Will Byers and faked his death. They killed my friend Barbara Holland.

9. Chapter 9

Chapter 8

Eleven woke up coughing. There was some sort of awful tasting substance in her mouth. She sat up and started spitting it out. She looked around and realized she was in the Upside Down. She had been certain that she would be "gone" like Nancy's friend Barb after she destroyed the demogorgan, but she was trapped in the same place the Will-her brother- had been trapped for four days.

"Mike!" Eleven called frantically, even though she knew he couldn't hear her. She couldn't make portals herself. Sure, she had opened the gate when Papa forced her to contact the demogorgan and she could expand the portals Will created, but she couldn't create the portals herself. "Will!" she called. "WILL!"

Her newly discovered brother was the only person who responded when she found him in the void. Eleven closed her eyes and tried to find her brother, but the rotting atmosphere of the Upside Down meant that there wasn't enough energy to go to her void. Eleven remembered earlier that night when her friends stood between her and the bad people. Papa was going to take her back to the bad place and take Will with her. She never wanted to go back there and she certainly didn't ever want Will to be there with Papa and the other bad people.

The demogorgan had created a portal in the wall. If he was still there, Eleven could break through it...

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Eleven made a snap decision to go to Mike's house once she was able to sneak past the agents and soldiers in the school. She could tell that they were the bad people who worked with Papa, but she still didn't feel safe going to them for help.

Mike's house was surrounded by several cars with flashing lights when Eleven got there. She stopped dead in her tracks. She saw Mike through the window. Agents were talking to him. He looked angry at

their questions. For a brief moment, Eleven thought she could see Mike looking directly at her. The agents turned around. The Wheeler's front door opened.

Eleven ran as fast as she could. She hid under some trees as she heard people looking for her. A dog peaked under the tree trunk where she was hiding. Eleven remembered Will's dog Chester. She slowly held out her hand and let the dog sniff. It leaned in, licked her face, and trotted off. After a few minutes, the agents disappeared. Eleven cautiously got out of her hiding place and decided to head to Will's house. Will-brother, Mrs. Byers-mother, Jonathan-brother. It could be her home.

When she got there, strange people were fixing the hole in the side of the house. She didn't know if they were good people like Mike and his friends or bad people like Papa. Eleven ran into the woods. She leaned against the tree to catch her breath. She was exhausted, but afraid to stop moving. She remembered the police chief's cabin. Maybe he would help her. She closed her eyes and tried to remember how to get there, but her powers were so drained, it didn't work. Eleven furiously wiped tears from her eyes. She looked over and noticed some sort of structure.

Eleven cautiously moved toward the structure. She saw the words "Castle Byers" on it. Eleven pulled back the sheet covering the front entrance. The moon was barley bright enough that she could make out drawings plastered on the walls. She recognized the style immediately. She noticed a stuffed lion sitting on the sleeping bag. It was exactly like the one she had in the lab. That lion was the only thing that gave her joy during her time as a test subject.

Eleven picked up the lion and hugged it. She curled up on Will's sleeping bag. "Will-brother." she whispered before fatigue overcame her and she drifted off to sleep.

As it happened, the moment Eleven hid under the log after running from the agents she saw at Mike's house, her newly discovered brother woke up in the hospital from a nightmare that he was being chased by federal agents.

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Will jolted awake. He looked around, unsure of where he was... the hospital. He was taken to the hospital after El-his sister vanished into thin air after saving them all. What had he, Will, done? Nothing, absolutely nothing... nothing useful at least.

Will heard his mother and brother talking to someone out in the hall. "I understand your concern, Mrs. Byers, but your son isn't normal. He needs specialized treatment. He really will be better off if we transfer him to the research hospital in Indianapolis."

"Over my dead body!" Will heard his mother shout. "Do you really think I'll trust you with my son after what you did to my daughter? She was just a baby and you *took* her for me. Then you faked Will's death. Your people were going to murder me. You were going to murder Hopper!"

"Mrs. Byers, that was Brenner and his people, not us."

"There are dozens of newspaper articles on Brenner's experiments going back decades," said Joyce. "Do you really expect us to believe you didn't know what he was doing. He took at least eleven children, including my daughter, Hopper's daughter, Terry Ives' daughter from their parents!"

"Look, Mrs. Byers, Brenner's on the run and Nancy Wheeler put us in a really awkward position.-"

"Nancy exposed the people who murdered Barb and Benny!" said Jonathan hotly. "You put yourselves in this position when you let Brenner murder people."

"We're trying to fix his mess. Please, we need your cooperation."

"I'll keep your dirty little secrets," said Joyce. "But you aren't taking my son and your aren't going to put any more murderers in Hawkins Lab."

"Like I said, Mr. Byers, your son isn't normal. He needs specialized care."

Will didn't want to wait around and hear anymore. He took the breathing tubes out of his nose. He then pulled the IV needles from

his arms. He stifled a scream as the blood started stream. Will grabbed some tissue from the tissue box beside his bed to stem the blood flow. He then focused on becoming invisible and managed to sneak past the people talking to his mother and brother.

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"Do you really think you saw El?" asked Lucas in a low voice as he, Dustin, and Mike talked quietly near the bathroom in the waiting room.

"I don't know, it happened so fast," said Mike.

"We saw her vanish and leave behind a bunch of floating particles," said Dustin.

"I know," said Mike. "But we thought we saw Will's body and that turned out to be fake..."

"Mike, this is completely different," said Dustin.

"Look, seeing her, it just felt so real," said Mike.

"Maybe it was," said Lucas. "But don't say anything to Will yet. Or Mrs. Byers or Jonathan."

"What? Why not? They have a right to know," said Mike.

"You're right, they do," said Lucas. "I really hope that you did see El and that she can live with her family, but if you didn't see her... they've been through so much and this will only cause them more pain."

"You're right," said Mike. "It just doesn't feel right not telling Will about this."

Jonathan came into the waiting room and frantically looking around. Nancy, who was sitting with her parents and Steve stood up. "Jonathan, is everything okay?"

Mike, Lucas and Dustin ran over to Jonathan. "Is Will up yet?" asked Mike.

"He's missing," said Jonathan. "A couple of those agents were trying to talk Mom into transferring him to a research hospital in Indianapolis. Mom's refusing, but Will must have woken up and overheard. He's not in his room. I thought...I thought maybe he came to see his friends or something."

"We'll help find him," said Mike.

"Michael," said Karen. "I think you should just leave this up to security." She looked to Ted for support, but he was snoring in his chair.

"I'm not leaving it up to them, Mom. Will's been through more than you can possibly imagine this week. He's probably scared. He needs his friends."

"I don't think the hospital will let us look around," said Dustin.

"They don't need to know," said Lucas. "Let's go!"

Karen stood up to stop them, but Nancy stood in front of her and held up her hands. "They're right, Mom. I don't trust any of those government assholes."

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Will hid in an out of order bathroom. After a few minutes, a couple of federal agents came looking for him and he managed to stay invisible until they left. Will sat in the stall and rested his head on his knees. He clutched his hair in his fists.

Will wasn't sure what to do. All he knew was that he felt scared and confused. He knew his mother would never let the agents take him, but what if they hurt her somehow? What if they went after Jonathan. Eleven had showed him her memories of the things Brenner did to her...and now she was gone. His sister who should have grown up with him was gone. He'd been helpless to stop it.

Will started to cry. He tried with no success to not make any noise as he didn't want to agents to walk by and hear him.

"Will?" That Mike. Will froze. What if the agents hurt Mike? or Lucas?

or Dustin? Was he putting his friends in danger just by being associated with them? "Will, it's alright. It's just me."

Mike pushed the unlatched stall door open. He looked down and Will noticed his haggard appearance. His face was pale, there were dark circles under his eyes, and bruises on his arms and hands from where he'd ripped out the IV needles. Mike knew he had to get Will back to his hospital room so he could rest.

Mike knelt beside Will and pulled him into a hug. He began to sob on Will's shoulder. Part of it was his relief at finding his friend, part was his sadness that Eleven wasn't there with him, part was pure frustration and the events of the week, and part was the simple fact that Will was probably the only person who could understand what he felt at that moment, so Will was the only person to whom he would show his feelings.

"Mike, are you okay?" asked Will. Mike looked up at Will and smiled. He reached up and gently wiped tears from under Will's eyes with his thumb. He half expected Eleven to join in the hug as she had done a couple nights earlier.

"I'm supposed to be the one asking you if you're okay, Will," said Mike. "I guess neither of us is okay, but we have each other."

"Yeah," said Will. "We do."

"There you are, Mr. Byers." Mike and Will looked up to see one of the federal agents. "We've been looking all over for you. Come with me, please!"

"No!" said Will. "GO AWAY! Leave me alone!"

"Mr. Byers, you're clearly troubled. It's understandable after everything you've been through. I'm here to help."

Mike spread his arms out protectively in front of Will and glared at the agent. "He doesn't want your help. You're not taking him."

"Mr. Wheeler, you and your friends have caused enough trouble. Don't cause anymore. Will here needs medical attention."

"What's going on here?" asked Hopper as he opened the door to the bathroom.

"I'm just trying to get the Byers boy back to the hospital room. He and his friend aren't cooperating."

Hopper walked over and stood between the children and the agent. "You can hardly blame them after all the shit you people have pulled."

"For the millionth time, Chief, that was Brenner. We had nothing to do with that. We're the good guys."

"Oh yeah?" said Hopper. "Prove it. Why don't you go back and let Joyce Byers know her son's been found and is on his way back to the hospital room. Let me handle getting him there as he clearly doesn't want to go back with you. While you're at it, you can get your buddies to stop trying to push Joyce to transfer her son to that place in Indianapolis."

"Chief, the kid is disturbed. That place could help. He just ripped out his IVs and hid."

"Did I stutter?" asked Hopper as he approached the agent menacingly. "You said you're the good guys and I just told you what you need to do to prove it. And this kid isn't disturbed, he's scared. It's a perfectly natural reaction to the things he's been through this week. Now get out of here and let me take care of him."

The agent opened his mouth as though he was about to retort, but the look on Hopper's face made him reconsider. He left without another word. Hopper turned to Mike and Will and knelt beside them.

"Are you two alright?" Will stared at the floor and nodded. Hopper had the urge to ask him what he was thinking and why would he put his mother through that, but stopped himself. He had answered the question moments earlier while talking to the agents. Will was scared, no terrified. Hopper couldn't blame him.

"Alright, let's get you back to your mother and brother."

"I just wanna go home," said Will softly.

"I know you do, but you have a lot of toxins in your system after breathing the air in that place for four days. You need to stay here a few days so they can get it out. Your mom already lost one kid. She doesn't need to lose another," said Hopper. Will seemed to hesitate. "Look, that dog of yours is still at my cabin. I'll go pick him up and bring him here. I'm sure I can talk the Wheelers into letting Mike stay with you as well. School's going to be out for a couple days anyway while they clean up the mess Brenner's people made."

"It is?" asked Mike.

"Yeah. They said they could have fixed everything in one night, but doing that would have looked suspicious after Nancy ran to the media."

"Okay," said Will. Mike got up and helped him to his feet. Will stumbled and nearly fell to the floor. He was dizzy from the blood loss. He leaned his fore head on the side of the stall as he tried to steady himself.

"C'mon, I got you," said Hopper as he gently lifted Will up. "You're in no condition to walk back to your room."

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Hopper stepped outside for a cigarette after returning Will to his room. As he took his first puff, a large black car pulled up. A man in a suit got out, opened the back door on the passenger side and gestured for Hopper to get in. He hesitated for a moment, took another puff and threw his cigarette to the ground.

"What do you want?" asked Hopper.

"We want your help," said the man in the suit. "Believe it or not, we want to help you. We want to help the Byers family as well."

"They don't seem to want your help. Neither do I."

"Not even to find your daughter?"

"You know where Sarah is?"

"Only Brenner and maybe a couple of other people know that. He managed to get to the lab and take most of his files before he left. From what we read, we do know that she was there for a time as test subject 9 and he went to great lengths to fake her death. He was very good at covering his tracks, but we believe we'll find her."

"What happens when you find her? And what about the other children? Will they be returned to their parents?"

"We'll return as many children as we can find to their parents. We'll have to come up with a good cover story. We don't need the Soviets or any of our other enemies finding out about Brenner's work."

"And what about Will Byers? Are you people going to stop pushing his mother to surrender him to you?"

"We might have a compromise for that."

"A compromise?" said Hopper. "What is there to compromise. "You need to leave them alone."

"Look, Chief, we understand why you and Joyce Byers don't trust us. We are trying to help you and Will Byers does need specialized help."

"What do you mean by specialized?"

"He was in that alternate dimension for four days. He was breathing toxic air. One top of that, he's apparently used his newly discovered abilities several times in the last three days. The use of the abilities of MKUltra children results from electrical currents from parts of the brains that most of us don't use-that's what causes the nose bleeds and passing out. We were able to see some of Brenner's files. Some of the children in his experiments died."

"Some of them died?" asked Hopper feeling more desperate to find Sara than ever. "Is using their abilities fatal?"

"Not the use of their abilities, though that does cause some physical stress. The methods Brenner used to try and get the abilities to manifest were fatal for some of the test subjects. Specifically all of the

male test subjects. Will Byers is very lucky that his sister was born first as he most likely would have died in the lab like all the other male test subjects. His sister, your daughter, and the other female test subjects were able to survive a lot. We have reason to believe that test subject Eleven su-" The suited man stopped himself.

"That test subject Eleven what?" Hopper demanded.

"Never mind, it's not important," said the suited man. Hopper considered insisted that the man finish his sentence, but decided to play dumb. He had a good idea what the rest of the sentence meant: they believed that Eleven had somehow survived. That meant she was out there somewhere. If the man in the suit didn't want him to know that, it meant that they would be looking for her with the intention of taking her into custody and perhaps keeping her as a lab rat for the rest of her life.

"So what's this compromise you were talking about?"

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Joyce glanced out the window at the sun peaking over the horizon. So much had changed since the last time it had set. She felt tired, but couldn't bring herself to sleep. She was afraid that Will would disappear again if no one kept an eye on him.

Will was sleeping in his hospital bed while Mike and Jonathan slept in chairs next to the bed. Joyce figured she would get some sleep when they woke up. When she closed her eyes, Joyce kept seeing the face of her stolen daughter. She saw the image that Terry Ives had shown her of Eleven being taken at birth. She saw the memory of Eleven hugging her Thursday afternoon at the Wheeler house.

Joyce thought about what could have been if she'd left Lonnie years earlier. She had seriously considered kicking him out while she was pregnant with Will and El. He had made Jonathan cry so many times as he kept telling a three year old to be a man. That was when she started to realize that Lonnie was like her father who had constantly told the somewhat tom boyish Joyce to be a proper young lady when she was growing up. Lonnie also constantly complained about the new child (or children as it turned out) being another mouth to feed.

Joyce had been seriously tempted to end her married to Lonnie at that point, but was afraid to raise children alone (that turned out to be what happened anyway). Maybe if she had left him, he would not have had the chance to sell El to the lab. Maybe she could have grown up with her brothers instead of as a prisoner. Now she was gone before she even had a chance to be normal.

Just then Joyce looked up to see Lonnie standing in the doorway to Will's hospital room. She quickly glanced at her sleeping sons before standing up, walking over to Lonnie and shoving him out of the room.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Joyce hissed. She tried to keep her voice down. As livid as she was with Lonnie, that was proving to be a challenge.

"I'm here to see my son, Joyce," said Lonnie.

"You're not getting near Will ever again after what you've done. You're not getting near Jonathan either. Now get out!"

"Is this about the law suit again? Joyce I was trying to help."

"That was bad enough, but you've done so much worse."

"Joyce, I only ever wanted the boys to toughen up. You were always too easy on them and they were constantly bullied at school."

"Bullshit, Lonnie! It was never about tough love with you. You never actually loved our-*my*- children. Dr. Brenner and his people gave me all the confirmation I need for that fact. They told me what you did the day Will was born. You've always tried to convince I was imagining things. Now I know what you did. I KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE! NOW GET OUT!"

Joyce was so angry that she couldn't stop herself from shouting the last part. Will had woken up the moment Joyce stepped out into the hall. The final sentence woke up Mike and Jonathan. Jonathan glanced and Will, then rushed out to the hall. He saw Lonnie approaching Joyce menacingly. Jonathan grabbed his father and shoved him against the wall.

"You're not getting anywhere near Will," Jonathan growled.

"I still have visitation rights," said Lonnie. "What will the courts say when they find out that your mother is trying to prevent me from seeing my son or they she clearly can't control you?"

"How long has it been since the last time you paid child support, Lonnie?" asked Hopper as he came down the hall with Chester and a couple of Hawkins police officers. "When was the last time you actually exercised your rights?"

"This is none of your business, Hopper," said Lonnie.

"You've been asked to leave," said Hopper. "Do we need to take you in?"

"I'm have a legal right to be here," said Lonnie.

"Actually, you don't," said Hopper as he pulled an envelope out of his pocket. "This is a restraining order courtesy of some new friends. Now you can leave on your own or we can make you leave. Oh, there's also an NDA clause about the people who paid you money for a lie you've been telling since Will was born."

Lonnie snatched the restraining order, glared and Hopper and left. "You alright?" Hopper asked Joyce and Jonathan. They nodded. "C'mon, we have a few things to discuss." He gestured to the hospital room while the two police officers waited outside as he closed the door.

"Sorry, Baby, I didn't mean to wake you," said Joyce as she walked over to Will and kissed his forehead. "Are you hungry? Do you want some breakfast? Mike's mom said she'd bring something over if you want."

"It's okay, I'm okay, Mom," said Will. He wasn't okay. Not really, but he knew that he had to put on a brave face. He didn't want to give any of the agents and excuse to take him away. He imagined they thought he was disturbed.

Hopper glanced at Mike. The Wheeler kid was in over his head as it was, there was no point in keeping things from him.

"Listen, they're bringing in a group of scientists to clean up Brenner's mess. Nancy forced their hand, but that's probably good for all of us. There are some press outside of the hospital and there's an official cover story: They've said the one of Brenner's human experiments escaped the lab on Sunday and started chasing Will to the lab when he was on his way home. Officially, Brenner held Will prisoner at the lab, faked his death and forged your signature on the death certificate, Joyce. The escaped John Doe was loose all week and chased Barb to the lab as well, but she got exposed to some toxic. Nancy and Jonathan were suspicious and investigated."

"That sounds as plausible all things considered," said Jonathan. "What all do they want from us?"

"Possibly more than they're letting on," said Hopper. "They claim they want to help, but.."

"You aren't sure," said Mike. Hopper shook his head.

"Right now, they say they want to help Will. There will be a new group of specialist as Hawkins lab to treat him."

"What?" said Will. "I'm not going there. My sister was a prisoner there for twelve years. They did terrible things to her, she showed me." Joyce put her arm around Will, pulled him closer and squeezed his shoulder.

"I know," said Hopper. "This would be an outpatient treatment. I still don't fully trust these people, but they made a few good points: you were trapped in another dimension breathing toxic air for four days, then before you could fully recover you were using abilities you never knew you had. Regular doctors aren't going to know how to treat that."

"How do we know they won't try anything?" asked Joyce. "They may not be Brenner, but they've allowed him to operate in Hawkins for decades."

"Whenever you go there, I'll be with you," said Hopper. "They need me to help keep their cover. I won't let them force you to go, Will, but they may be the only people who can help you."

Will considered Hopper carefully for a moment, then sighed. "Fine."

The room was filled with people who had to put on brave faces. Will didn't want the federal agents to have any control over his life. He didn't want to give them any excuses. Joyce, although she was screaming inside at the loss of her newly discovered daughter, knew that she had to be brave for both of her sons. Mike desperately wanted to tell the Byers family that Eleven might be alive, but part of him feared that he was wrong and another part knew that if she was alive it meant she was hiding from the bad people. Jonathan knew that he had to be there for his family more than ever. Hopper wanted to find Sarah. He also wanted to find Eleven before any agents did. He was blissfully ignorant a week ago and he knew that his life and the lives of the people he cared about would never be the same.

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AN: I was going to write this chapter with Joyce, Jonathan and Will finding out that Eleven might be alive, but then the next chapter, which should be up soon wouldn't make sense.

10. Chapter 10

Chapter 10

A lot of mothers in town, in the effort to be "helpful" had ever so kindly suggested to Joyce that she needed to take a break in the weeks that followed Will's return. Joyce would smile and thank them for their concern, but she really wanted to tell them to mind their own business. She would have loved to take time off, but didn't have that luxury. She was a single mother raising two boys. She had an ex-husband who hadn't paid child support in over three years. She had also taken a two week advance at work and needed to work extra hours to make that up and keep up with her bills.

Jonathan was also working extra hours to help out. Will spent a lot of time at Mike's house, so only saw his mother and brother early in the morning just after getting and late at night just before going to bed. They hugged him a lot more, needing to reassure themselves that he was alive and well.

The day that Will came home after a week in the hospital, he went out with Mike and Jonathan to gather his things from Castle Byers before the winter weather started. The first thing he picked up was his old stuffed lion. He thought that there had been more of his drawings in the fort before he had been trapped in the Upside Down. There had also been a bag with one of his sketch books and colored pencils...Maybe it was in his room somewhere. "Leave that," said Will as Jonathan and Mike started to roll up his sleeping bag.

"Why?" asked Jonathan. "Buddy, we need to get this stuff inside.

"I don't know," said Will. "Just... leave it, okay?"

Mike and Jonathan exchanged a look. "Alright," said Jonathan.

Eleven was just returning from a scavenging trip. She had taken some water and jerky from some campers. She stopped dead in her tracks then hid behind a tree when she saw that her brothers and Mike in Castle Byers. She wanted more than anything to call out to them and let them know that she was there. She wanted to run to them and

hug them. She knew she couldn't do that. The bad people were still looking for her. Her family and friends, especially Will, would be in danger if they knew about her.

Suddenly, Chester the dog was standing beside her wagging his tail. Eleven carefully reached over and scratched behind his ear. He licked her face, then leaned on her. Eleven put her arms around the dog's neck. He felt warm.

When Will, Mike, and Jonathan headed back, they called to Chester and Eleven went back into the fort. She was grateful that they had left the sleeping bag and pillow, but felt a little saddened that they had taken the drawings in the stuffed lion. Eleven opened the bag. It had some of the supplies she'd taken from the campers. More importantly, it had her brother's drawings.

Eleven took out the sketch book and flipped through her brother's drawings. Some of the drawings clearly contained images of Mike, Lucas, and Dustin with Will on adventures. Eleven caressed a drawing of Mike's character. The memory of Mike kissing her gave her some comfort. She didn't know what kissing was, but she knew that she liked it when Mike kissed her.

She flipped through the pages to her own drawings that she had attempted. They weren't nearly as good as her brother's drawings. Maybe he could teach her someday...when the bad people were no longer after her. Eleven wiped tears from her eyes. She had barely spent any time with her mother and brothers, but already missed them terribly. She had spent a few days with Mike and missed him terribly.

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The weather got very cold in early December. Will really felt it, though he kept that from his mother and brother. They were already worried enough. He didn't say much when he visited Hawkins lab. He felt a gripping terror as he entered, but kept that to himself.

Dr. Owens, the new person in charge at Hawkins Lab seemed perfectly nice, but Will wasn't ready to trust him. The cameras that recorded his sessions did not go unnoticed by Will.

Hawkins was expecting a few inches of snow on the second Friday of December. The Wednesday before that weekend was one of the rare nights that Joyce and Jonathan were home for dinner. Will decided to ask his mother if it was alright for him to shovel snow in Mike's neighborhood that Saturday so he could earn money to buy everyone Christmas presents. Knowing that his friends, his mother, and his brother had risked everything to save him made Christmas shopping more important than ever. Will wanted to show everyone how much he appreciated them.

"I'm sorry, Will, but both your brother and I have to work," said Joyce.

"Mike and I have been fine doing it on our own for years," said Will.

"But things are different now. The people who took your sister... Look, I'm sorry, Baby, it's just too risky."

Will was silent for a couple minutes. "I'm not hungry anymore. Can I be excused?"

"Yeah, of course," said Joyce. Will took his dishes to the sink, washed them and went to his room. On his way back from the bathroom later that night. He knocked on her bedroom door.

"Mom?" Will called.

"Come in, Baby," said Joyce.

"I'm sorry, Mom," said Will as he closed the door behind him.

"You don't have anything to be sorry for," said Joyce as she patted the spot next to her on her bed. Will climbed up and sat beside her. She pulled him into a hug.

"I'm not making things easy for you," said Will.

"It's not your job to make things easy for me, baby. You've never made things difficult anyway. I just..I just really miss your sister. We barely got any time with her and she was taken from us twice."

"I miss her too," said Will.

"The people who took her are vindictive and evil," said Joyce. "I don't know what I'd do if they got you too,"

The next evening Will was at the Wheeler house while his mother and brother worked. Steve, who was over there with Nancy talking about how to help Barb's parents while they were grieving (the funeral for Barb had happened the week before. It had been delayed thanks to them having to perform a more thorough autopsy than normal). He overheard Mike and Will talking about wanting to shovel snow and offered to take them. He figured it was a way to continue to make things up to both Nancy and Jonathan.

Joyce reluctantly agreed to letting Steve watch over Mike and Will and they shoveled driveways. Being the Boy Who Came Back to Life, a lot of people paid him generously. Will tried to give some of the money to his mother and brother, but they told me to keep it."

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One day at school, about a week before Christmas break started, Will felt a penetrating cold in his body at the very moment that Eleven had fallen into a cold puddle while she was out looking for food. The days were getting shorter and shorter and she had started Will put his head down on his desk and started to shiver violently.

"Will," said Mike as he put his hand on Will's arm. "Are you okay?" Will looked up to see Mike's concerned face. He looked forward to see Dustin and Lucas looking worried as well and the rest of his classmates staring at him. He'd grown used to people staring at him since he'd returned from the Upside Down, but still didn't like it.

"Sorry," said Will. Mr. Clarke walked up to him.

"Mike, can you take Will to the nurse's office," said Mr. Clarke.

"I'm okay, Mr. Clarke, really. I don't want to miss any more class," said Will as he brushed his hair from his eyes.

"Will, you're shivering. You may have the flu. Go to the nurse's office just to be safe, alright?" Mr. Clarke patted Will's shoulder. He stuffed his supplies into his back pack and Mike followed him.

Will tried to hide his shivering as he walked down the hallway. Mike gently grabbed his arm. "Will, what's going on?"

Will looked at Mike carefully then looked at the floor. "I don't know, I just suddenly felt really cold. It doesn't make any sense, but I don't think I'm sick."

"What do you think it is?" asked Mike.

Will shrugged. "I don't know."

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Eleven leaned her head against a tree as she shivered. She knew she had to get warm and dry, but didn't know where or how. She started crying in frustration when she suddenly heard footsteps. She fell back and looked up, hoping that it wasn't one of the bad people approaching. The hunter she'd run into the day before (and taken his hat and coat after knocking him out) hadn't recognized her after all... Eleven was surprised with a familiar and friendly face. She relaxed a little and leaned on the tree and she continued to shiver.

"Jesus, kid, what happened? You're soaked," said Hopper as he knelt beside Eleven and started rubbing her arms.

"I fell... I fell into the water," said Eleven.

"Okay, I'm going to get you somewhere warm before you catch pneumonia."

Eleven shook her head. "It's not safe. The bad people could hurt you. They could hurt Mike. They could hurt my Mom and brothers and Dustin and Lucas."

"They aren't going to hurt anyone. I won't let that happen," said Hopper. "Now c'mon. Your mother will kill me if she finds out I left you in the woods freezing. Besides, the guy you got this hat and jacket from already made a report, so I figured that I'd better find you before any department of energy agents do. " Eleven nodded and Hopper helped her to her feet. She walked over and grabbed Will's old bag full of his art work, feeling grateful that she had set it down before checking for something to hunt. Hopper led her to his truck

and opened the passenger door.

"Stay on the floor so no one sees you, alright?"

Eleven nodded and got in. She set the bag aside trying not to get it wet. Hopper grabbed a blanket from the back seat and covered her with it. He closed the door, went over to the driver's side and turned on the engine. The feeling of the heater blowing warm dry air on Eleven was the most physical comfort she'd felt in weeks.

"I'll take you to my trailer for a few days. We can fix up my cabin in the woods and make it livable. That'll be much safer in the long run. We can't tell your family and friends just yet either. There are some new people at the lab, but I don't know if they're good or bad yet. I think those federal agents suspect that you're still alive, but they didn't want me to know."

Eleven nodded. "I understand."

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"We should call your mother to come pick you up," said the nurse. "You don't seem to have the flu, but that shivering isn't normal."

"No, I feel better now," said Will earnestly. It was true. He suddenly wasn't freezing anymore. "Please don't call my Mom. I don't want to get her in trouble at work."

The nurse, who happened to be a single mother herself, considered Will for a moment and sighed. "Alright, but if you get chills again, let me know. Keep an eye on your friend, Mr. Wheeler," said added to Mike who nodded.

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Hopper pulled into the alley behind the thrift store. "Wait here, kid. I'm going to get you some dry clothes. Stay under that blanket and out of sight, alright?"

"Alright," said Eleven. As Hopper went into the donation area in the back of the store to grab a box of clothes for Eleven and leave some money to the store, Eleven closed her eyes and focused on Will. He

was the only person she could see without using a radio and he was with Mike a lot of the time.

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"Isn't that Will Byers?" Patricia Johnson asked her son Tom when she was picking him up from school. She saw Will getting his books from his lockers through the school entrance. "Why don't you invite him to your New Years Eve party?"

"What? No! Mom, he's a nerd. I can't have him at my party!"

"Tom, he's been through a lot lately. It would be a nice gesture. Just ask him."

"But *Mom!*"

"Tom, your father doesn't want to to have this party because of your last report card. I can cancel it and your father taking you to the Pacers game..."

"Fine!" Tom groaned. He dropped his book in the car and his mother got out of the car to watch with an eager smile on her face. Tom hoped that no one saw him talking to a loser like Will Byers. He cleared his throat and Will looked up. "My mom is making invite you to my New Years eve party."

Will looked past Tommy to see Tom's smiling mother. He didn't like Mrs. Johnson's smile. It was the smile of a woman who felt very good about herself. Will had felt awkward and unwanted at a lot of parties throughout his life and guys like Tom had often made him feel that way. He certainly didn't want to be at a party where he wasn't wanted. "Don't worry, Tom, I don't want to come!"

Although Tom didn't want Will at his party, the way he turned the invitation down was infuriating. Who was a loser like Will Byers to turn down an invitation to one of his parties. "You should be grateful, loser. How many party invitations do you think a boonie trash nerd like you is going to get?"

"I've just gotten one I don't want, I'm sure they'll be others," said Will coolly. Normally, Tom would have knocked Will's books out of his

hands or shoved him into his locker, but his mother was watching.

"I'm not gonna forget this," said Tommy as he poked Will really hard in his chest.

"You're not going to forget what?" asked Jennifer Hayes as she approached Will's locker with her best friend Julie Mason. "You mommy made you ask Will to go to your stupid party and he said no. Leave him alone."

Will stared at the floor. He didn't like attracting attention to himself, especially after returning from the dead.

"I was only going to your party because my mom was making me," Jennifer continued. "I really don't want to go and maybe Mom won't make me anymore after the way you're acting."

"I don't think mine will either," said Julie.

"Look at this, the little fairy needs girls to stand up for him," said Tom. Will felt the color rise in his face as Tom called him the cruel nickname the kids who had always tormented Will and his friends. Lucas was always midnight, Mike was frog face, Dustin was toothless and Will.. Will was the fairy. It had started among the kids of the men his father hung out with-like Troy's father. The name calling spread to a lot of other kids as well. It started with Lonnie and everything that started with Lonnie made Will even angrier after learning that he had sold Eleven to scientists when she was born.

"Back off, Tom," said Lucas as he walked up behind Will. "Or you want me to call your mommy down here." Tom looked around, then glared at Lucas and Will before heading out to his mother's car.

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"Hey, kid, you alright," asked Hopper as he closed the door, put a box and some grocery bags in the back seat, and turned on the engine.

"Fine," said Eleven from under her blanket. She wiped tears from her eyes. She hated that kids were mean to her brother. She knew that Mike hated it too the way he had shoved Troy. Tom had just called Will the same name. Eleven wanted to make Tom pee himself in front

of everyone.

The truck slowed down and came to a stop after several minutes. "Hang on a second, kid, I'm gonna make sure the coast is clear," said Hopper. as he grabbed the grocery bags from the back.

"Okay," said Eleven. She waited for about two minutes before Hopper came back.

"Alright, coast is clear. Here's a couple more blankets to keep you warm while you're going inside," said Hopper. He then grabbed the box of clothes he'd gotten Eleven at the thrift store and she followed him inside. Hopper kicked off his boots as he closed the door behind Eleven. She did the same with her shoes.

Hopper set the box of clothes in the bathroom and set it down. He then grabbed some clean towels and set them next to the box. "Think you can manage this?" asked Hopper as he patted the shower. Eleven nodded. "Good, get yourself warmed up and pick out some dry clothes from the box before you get sick. I'll make you some dinner. We'll work together on a plan to make my cabin more livable. They won't find you out there."

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"It's no problem at all," said Bob as he handed Joyce a bag with some electronics to Joyce. "I get a managers discount, so I get so much stuff for free."

Joyce sighed and smiled. Since Will had come back from the dead, a lot of people had been making nice gestures for her and her sons. Even her sisters, who she barely spoke to had sent packages filled with Christmas presents. Joyce often didn't want to accept gifts from people who weren't sincere, but Bob Newby was one of the few sincere people in town. She was seeing him a lot more with all the extra hours she was working as he worked next door. They had always been friendly, but she was getting to know him better recently.

"Thanks, Bob," said Joyce. "Sorry, I've just been so frazzled lately."

"That's alright," said Bob. "You've been through a lot. If there's anything I can do to help, let me know."

A woman clearing her throat interrupted Joyce and Bob's conversation. "Sorry about that, Patty," said Joyce.

"That's alright," said Patty Johnson as she set down the Christmas decorations she was purchasing on the counter and brushed her platinum blonde hair out of her face and Joyce began to ring the decorations up.

"I'll see you later," said Bob as he left.

"So, my son is having a New Years Eve party," said Patty.

"You must have a lot of work to do for that," said Joyce as she gave her most customer friendly smile.

"It is," said Patty. "I had him invite your son to the party, I thought it would be a nice gesture, but Will refused."

Joyce put a lot of effort into not rolling her eyes because she was on the clock. Tom Johnson had never exactly been nice to Will and his friends and when they were in school together, Patty was never exactly nice to Joyce. "Sorry about that. Will's always been really shy, and he's been through a lot lately."

"Do you think you could talk him into going to the party? Maybe it could help him get over his shyness."

"I'll try," said Joyce.

"Great," said Patty.

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"The boys seem to be looking forward to their Christmas Eve campaign tomorrow," said Karen to Joyce as they pulled into the Hawkins city rec center on December 23. Karen had picked up Joyce after she got home from work and talked her into going to a Christmas party (which was really a surprise for Joyce that some of the women on the PTA had done. They have collected money to buy

Christmas presents for Joyce and her sons). Will was at the Wheeler house hanging out with Mike and Jonathan was working a late shift at the movie theater.

"Yeah, it's always good for Will to do things he enjoys. I think the campaigns make him feel normal again," said Joyce as they got out of the car and started walking to the building.

"They seem to do the same for Mike," said Karen. As she opened the door, Patty Johnson's voice drifted down the hall.

"She's so ungrateful. She won't even making her son come to Tom's party."

Joyce froze. Karen stopped with her.

"He doesn't want to come," said Anne Mason. *"What's the big deal?"*

Joyce glanced and Karen and started walking down the hall again. She was off the clock and had a few things to say to high and mighty Patty Johnson.

"She's being irresponsible if you ask me," said Patty. All the women in the room had their backs facing to the entrance and didn't notice Joyce and Karen entering the room. "If *my* son had gone missing, I'd be at home taking care of him, not working extra hours."

"What's the matter with you, Patty?" asked Cindy Hayes. "She's working so she can take care of her son's. That's not irresponsible."

"If she'd worked harder to keep their father happy, maybe she wouldn't have be a cashier," said Patty with disdain. Maggie Wilson and Sandy Carter turned around to see Joyce and Karen standing there.

"Joyce!" said Maggie as she laughed nervously. "We um, took up a collection and got some Christmas presents for you and your boys."

Joyce swallowed hard. She didn't want the women in the room to see her cry. "You know what? We don't need your presents or your pity!" Joyce turned and headed back down the hallway followed by Karen.

"Joyce, wait," said Patty and she ran after them. "Don't let your pride

stop your boys from having a nice Christmas."

Joyce angrily spun around so fast, she startled both Karen and Patty. "Why don't you just donate these gifts to a homeless shelter. Then you can still feel good about yourself, Patty. Isn't that always the reason you do nice things?' Joyce then ran out to Karen's car, got in, and buried her face in her hands. She felt Karen's hand rubbing circles on her back.

"I'm so sorry about that," said Karen.

"I know you meant well, Karen, but most of the people in this town have been talking about me behind my back since I was a kid. I don't need their fake charity."

"I think at least some of them really do care and want to help," said Karen.

"Maybe," said Joyce. She was startled by a knock at the window. It was Anne Mason. Joyce decided to roll down her window as Anne had always seemed to be genuinely nice to her at least.

"Joyce, look, sorry about Patty. She heard we were doing this and decided to get involved. But, well she reads too much Phyllis Schlafly and has never worked a day in her life."

"That's true," said Joyce.

Anne held out an envelope filled with cash to Joyce who held up her own hand and shook her head. "I don't need anyone's pity."

"This isn't pity," said Anne. "You and the Hollands have had to deal with more than anyone should have to deal with thanks to those psychos at the lab. You haven't been able to take a break. This is just to help you breathe a little."

Joyce sighed and took the envelope. "Thanks, Anne."

"Look, my daughter helped me pick out the gifts for Will. She's always spoken very highly of your son. Please, take some of these gifts. We can still drop off the ones that Patty picked out at a homeless shelter. How about that? Most of the people in there really

did want to help because they're mothers who love their children just like you love yours. They respect you for not giving up on Will when that fake body turned up in the quarry.

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Joyce stared at the runny mash potatoes she'd made on Christmas Eve as she waiting for Jonathan to bring Will home from the Wheelers. She regretted adding so much water while she boiled them.

It was her first Christmas being aware that she had a daughter who had been taken from her. The holiday was causing her to think about what more she could have done to save Eleven. Kick Lonnie out before the twins were born, perhaps.

Joyce glanced and the generous pile of presents under the tree. She wished that Eleven was there with them. She wanted to watch her daughter's face light up as she opened gifts. She wanted her three children to create their own Christmas traditions together. She wistfully imagined Will and Eleven at six years old playing with a new net of building blocks near the Christmas tree with a nine year old Jonathan taking pictures with his first camera. It should have been a real memory.

If Joyce had known that Eleven had survived her showdown with the demogorgan and was safely munching on food for the Hawkins Police Christmas potluck, she would have felt better...perhaps allowed herself to feel a little happiness.

Will noticed the pile of Christmas presents when he got home. In past years, he would have been excited, but in 1983, the sight made him feel sad. Some of those presents should have been for Eleven. He started to wonder again, what he should have done to help her fight the demogorgan.

Jonathan really liked the camera he'd gotten from Nancy, but didn't feel like using it at that moment. His mother and brother were both putting on brave faces. He wanted to capture happy moments with his family, not moments of brave faces.

Jonathan put the camera in his room before dinner. He saw Will in

the bathroom washing his hands. He seemed to be lost in thought. Suddenly he looked like something had startled him. He was looking around with sheer terror. Will then looked in the mirror and slowly reached up to turn off the facet.

"Will? Are you alright?" Will looked up. He seemed to calm down as he looked at Jonathan.

"I'm fine, just a little tired."

"Will, if something happened, we should tell mom."

"Nothing happened, and Mom already has enough to worry about," said Will pointedly. He walked past Jonathan. He wasn't sure what had just happened, but for a few horrible seconds, it was as though he was back in the Upside Down. There was no point in telling his mother and Jonathan as they would worry, but have no idea what to do. His sister would have known, or they could have figured it out together.

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That night, Will had a nightmare. It was a nightmare that reflected his worst fears.

It was a funeral for Eleven. Will walked up the where his friends and family were standing. He stood next to Mike.

"Why did this have to happen?" said Mike. "Why did this have to happen to her?"

"Yeah, it sucks," said Will.

"It sucks that it had to be her and not you," said Mike.

"What?" asked a stunned Will.

"I said it should have been you," said Mike angrily. "If you had actually been helpful that night, maybe she wouldn't have died."

"Yeah, you were pretty useless that night," said Dustin.

"Are we surprised? He's always been useless," said Lucas.

"They should have taken you when you were born," said Joyce. "She should have grown up with us. You should have been in that lab, not her."

"I could have had a strong little sister instead of a weak little brother," said Jonathan. "You don't be long here."

"You don't belong here," Mike Echoed.

"It should have been you," Joyce spat. "You don't belong here."

Will's family and friends began to chant "You don't belong, it should have been you!" over and over again. The approached him menacingly as they chanted. Will backed up further and further until he tripped and fell into a deep hole. When he finally hit the ground-

Will woke up in his bed. He looked out his window as the morning light hit his face. Will blinked back tears, pulled his covers up over his face, and curled into a fetal position.

"Will, honey, are you awake?" asked Joyce. "There's a lot of presents to open."

"Don't want them, don't deserve them," Will muttered from under his covers.

"What?" said Joyce. Will threw off his covers and sat up.

"I don't deserve presents," said Will angrily. Joyce noticed that his eyes were red and puffy from crying. She knelt beside him and put her hand on his arm.

"Sweetie, what's wrong? Talk to me."

Will looked frightened at his mother's touch. He hopped out of his bed and started backing away as he shook his head.

"Will, talk to me, baby, please. What's going on?"

Will back into a bookshelf. It startled him. Will suddenly became angry and started throwing his books and toys. It was the result of all

the suppressed anger, fear and sadness he'd felt since waking up and seeing the scorch marks from where his sister disappeared.

"Will! Will stop!" Joyce pleaded. Jonathan heard the commotion and ran into the room. He rushed forward and grabbed his little brother, pinning Will's arms to his side.

"Let me go, Jonathan!" Will shouted.

"Not until you calm down!" said Jonathan as he tightened his grip.

"LETMEGO! LETMEGO! LETMEGO!" Will screamed over and over again until he burst into sobs and slumped against Jonathan who slowly lowered him to a sitting position on the floor.

Jonathan began to rock his little brother back and forth as he had done so many times when Will was younger. "Ssssh, Buddy, it's okay, you're alright," said Jonathan. Joyce wrapped her arms around both of her sons and held them.

"I'm sorry," said Will.

"It's alright, Baby," said Joyce. "Why don't we get you some breakfast."

"I can't, Mom, I just can't," said Will. "I just want to be alone, please."

Joyce sighed. She gently took Will's face in her hands. "Alright, just promise me you won't disappear like you did last month in the hospital."

"I promise," said Will. Joyce kissed his forehead. She gestured to Jonathan and he released Will. Will crawled over to his bed and leaned against it bringing his knees up to his chin and wrapping his arms around his legs. He stared blankly ahead.

"He needs help and I have no idea how to help him," said Joyce as she leaned on the kitchen counter and buried her face in her hands. "We can't trust the people in the lab and those federal agents are looking for any excuse to take him into custody."

"He's probably been going through this since everything happened

and afraid to talk about it because of all of that stuff with the feds," said Jonathan. "We'll figure something out."

Will wasn't hungry for lunch and showed no interest in his presents when the afternoon rolled around. He just continued to stare blankly at the wall in his room. Joyce tried to call Hopper, but only got a machine at his trailer (unaware that her thought to be dead daughter was there). When she called the police station, Hopper was out responding to an incident with some disorderly drunks.

"Mike," said Jonathan. "Mike was able to find him and get through to him when he was hiding in the hospital. Maybe he'll talk to Mike."

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Mike sat quietly in the basement of his home inside his pillow fort. His mother's side of the family was visiting. While they weren't nearly as bad as his father's relatives, he still didn't feel like talking to them. He stared at his supercom. He was waiting for his extending family to leave so he could try to contact Eleven again on day 42.

"Michael," said Karen as she came down the basement stairs. A few seconds later she was pulling back the sheet on the pillow fort.

"I just wanna be alone, Mom," said Mike.

"I know you do," said Karen. "But Mrs. Byers just called. Apparently Will is refusing to eat or open his Christmas presents. He's really upset about something. She thought you might be able to help."

As much as Mike wanted to sit alone and think about Eleven, Will was the one person who could get him out of that pillow fort at that moment. "Yeah, yeah I'll do whatever I can."

"Okay, go upstairs and pack an overnight bag. I'll call Joyce and Jonathan will be over here shortly to pick you up."

Normally, Karen wouldn't allow her son to go over to a friend's house on Christmas Day when she had family over, but she had seen first hand how difficult things were for Joyce and how difficult things must have been for Will.

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"Will?" said Mike as he carefully entered Will's room and closed the door. He walked around the bed and saw Will sitting on the floor staring blankly ahead. Chester was curled up next to Will with his head on his knee. Mike knelt beside his friend.

"Will," he said as he put his hand on Will's shoulder. Will gave a startled jolt and looked at Mike as though he was just realizing that he was there. Mike saw fear in Will's eyes. It was only for a brief moment, but it was as though Will was afraid of Mike.

"Sorry," said Will. He brushed tears from his eyes and Mike sat beside him.

"Will, what happened?"

Will considered Mike carefully then shook his head. "Nothing, nothing happened."

"We were all having a great time last night. You seemed happy and now...I don't know you seem to be feeling the same way I've been feeling..."

Will looked at Mike again. He remembered the day Mike had found him hiding in the hospital. Mike would understand, he always did.

"It was just a bad dream," said Will.

"A bad dream about what?" asked Mike. Will took a deep breath.

"Everyone was at El's funeral...and you were all saying that I don't belong here...that it should have been me.."

Eleven was actually tuning into the conversation at that moment because Hopper was out doing police work. She wanted to reach out to her brother and tell him that she was alright more than anything.

"Will, none of us think that," said Mike. He pulled Will into a hug. "*None* of us think that."

"I think that," said Will. "This room should be hers. Those presents

out there should be hers. She should be here, not me. I should have done more the help her."

"I wish that El was with us more than anything, but I don't want you to trade places with her. And what happened wasn't your fault. It wasn't El's fault either. Remember when she blamed herself for opening the gate and you told her it was Brenner's fault? You were right. They're the ones who did this, not El and not you."

"You're right, Mike. I just..."

"You just still feel responsible for things that aren't your fault," said Mike. Will shrugged and stared ahead again. Mike made a decision in that moment. His instincts had been telling him for over a month that Eleven was still alive. He knew that Dustin and Lucas had meant well when they told him that it would only cause Will and his family more pain if Eleven wasn't alive. He knew that Dustin and Lucas genuinely cared about Will...But every instinct Mike had told him that telling Will that he'd seen Eleven outside of his home the night she disappeared was the right thing to do. He decided to discuss it with Will when they weren't in earshot of Mrs. Byers and Jonathan was best. "You know what? It's been a long time since we've had a good snowball fight and there's a lot of snow out there today. What do you say?"

"A snowball fight?"

"You heard me," said Mike. He decided to appeal to Will's ever present desire to help his friends. Mike stood up and held out his hand to Will. "C'mon, I need this." Will took Mike's hand and got to his feet. "Get dressed, it's freezing outside."

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"Where are you two going?" asked Joyce.

"We're going to have a snowball fight, Mrs. Byers," said Mike. Joyce looked like she was going to object, but seemed to think better of it.

"Just stay in sight of the window," said Joyce. She watched them go outside. Jonathan stood beside her. They had both overheard what he

had said to Mike and weren't sure how to talk to him about it. Mike had said what they felt. They wanted Eleven back, but didn't wish Will away in the process and didn't want him to feel that way either. She was worried about Will's outburst, and yet she understood it. She felt like having a few herself.

"There's something I need to tell you, Will," said Mike as he tugged Will's arm. He nodded toward the shed.

Will hesitated for a moment. The shed was where he had vanished into the Upside Down...But Mike wasn't with him when that happened.

Mike waved at Mrs. Byers and Jonathan before he and Will stepped inside the shed. Mike closed the door after Chester entered. Something occurred to him. Eleven had mentioned that the bad people had been there. Mike knew that the federal agents were listening to his family's calls, what if they had bugged the Byers shed? He grabbed one of Chester's old chew toys and thought about the fact that his own parents would never let him have a dog because they were "too messy."

Mike gestured for Will to follow and they left the shed and walked over to a nearby tree. Mike threw the toy for Chester to catch.

"Mike, are you okay?" asked Will.

"I'm fine," said Mike. "There's just something I've been keeping from you, I didn't want to give you false hope. I-I still don't, but every instinct tells me that I saw what I thought I saw."

"What did you see?"

"I saw El. The night that the feds were at my house. It was only for a second, but I know it was her."

Will looked down to see Chester holding his toy. He dropped it at Will's feet. Will glanced at Mike before picking up the toy and tossing it for his dog.

"You're sure it was her and not just wishful thinking?"

"Not completely, but seeing her just felt so real...So I've been trying to call her every night on my supercom."

"You have?" asked Will. Mike nodded.

"I have to try, Will. I have to." Will bit his lip.

"She probably can't answer because the bad people might be listening."

Mike's eyes widened. "That's right, the bad people might hear her if she answered over the supercom, but they couldn't hear her if she used telepathy with you..." Mike took the dog toy from Chester, threw it, and grabbed Will by his shoulders.

"Mike, what-"

"Sorry, Will, I have to try," said Mike. Mike pulled Will closer and started speaking and hoping that Eleven could hear him. "El, I know that you probably can't answer me over the supercom because the bad people might hear. They won't hear if you let us know through Will, they won't hear you, they won't!" Mike paused and wiped tears from his eyes. "Can you just please let us know that you're alright, please?"

Mike stood back and looked at Will, who didn't seem to know how he felt about what just happened. He glanced at Mike then seemed to be concentrating. He looked back up and shook his head. "Sorry, Mike."

Mike slowly exhaled and rubbed his eyes. Eleven actually was listening at that moment and wanted to respond, but was too scared.

"Maybe...maybe she's just not using her powers now or something," said Will. "We shouldn't give up." Will paused for a moment. "It's really important to you, isn't it? I mean, I know Dustin and Lucas cared about El, but it's different with you."

"I asked her to the Snow Ball," said Mike. He hadn't spoken to anyone about that since he had actually asked Eleven. "And I kissed her then she kissed me back." Mike couldn't believe he was telling Will that he had kissed Will's long lost sister, but he felt the need to tell *someone* and he had always told Will everything.

"That figures," said Will lightly.

"That's all you have to say? That figures?" asked an astonished Mike.

"Yeah, well I kinda figured you liked each other from that time with the wig. It was pretty obvious. I mean, I didn't know she was my sister yet..."

"What?" asked Mike after a minute of silence from Will.

"You kissed my *sister*," said Will in mock anger. He jumped up and pulled Mike into a headlock then wrestled him to the ground. Will sat up, made a snow ball and threw it at Mike.

"I didn't know she was your sister, but I still would have kissed even if I did know." Mike threw his own snowball back at Will. They both started laughing, stood up and continued to throw snow balls at each other.

Mike and Will threw snowballs at each other and ducked behind trees to avoid getting hit as Chester ran between them. After a few minutes, they found themselves genuinely laughing. Will ran behind the shed to avoid the most recent snowball. He slipped on a thin patch of ice and fell into a puddle of freezing water.

"Will!" Mike yelled as he rushed over to help Will out of the puddle, which was much larger than a normal puddle. Will was violently shivering. It reminded Mike of the way he had shivered in Mr. Clarke's class a week earlier. "Let's get you inside

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Eleven couldn't stand it anymore. They had to let her family and Mike know she was safe. She knew she could contact Will. She had to tell them she was alive, just so they wouldn't be so sad all the time.

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Will sat in the warm bath his mother had drawn for him. He submerged himself almost completely so that just his nose and mouth were sticking out of the water. He had an idea and got out of the tub and put on the dry clothes his. Will brushed off the steam from the

mirror and looked at his reflection. He sat on the floor next to the wall. Will closed his eyes and focused, decided to merely think and not say anything out loud.

Eleven happened to be watching Will at that moment. She checked in on him more than anyone else as she didn't have to use electronics and finding Will never caused a bloody nose. Despite knowing that her family was in danger if they knew where she was and she herself could be in danger, Eleven couldn't stand the endless hours of loneliness she had to endure while Hopper was at work. She didn't have to tell them where she was, only that she was alright.

"El, we need to know if you're alright... Just give me a sign if you can hear me," Will thought. He suddenly found himself in some sort of black void. He looked around. After looking off to the side, his head turned so he was looking straight ahead and Eleven was standing in front of him. Will was speechless.

Eleven had tears in her eyes. Her hair has grown since the night she had disappeared, but was still incredibly short. Eleven took a stunned Will's right and held in in both of hers.

"Will, brother," said Eleven.

"El?" said Will. "Are you real? Are you alright? Where are you?"

Eleven smiled a little. "I'm real. I'm safe. A friend is helping me."

"Friend? Who?"

"A new friend. Can't tell you, it's not safe. I've seen you, seen Mike, seen mother and Jonathan. I'm sorry."

"Sorry? Why are you sorry? You haven't done anything."

"Everyone's been sad. Haven't told you I'm alive. Saw you and Mike and Jonathan that day at Castle Byers. Wanted to call you and didn't. I-I'm sorry."

"It's okay, El. It's okay," said Will. "Were you staying in Castle Byers?"

Eleven nodded. "But not anymore. I fell into some really cold water

on day 34 and my new friend took me somewhere warm."

"Day 34?" said Will. It took him a moment to realize that Eleven must have been counting the days since she had to start running. "You stayed in Castle Byers for 34 days? It was freezing." Eleven nodded. Will suddenly felt very glad that he'd left his sleeping bag in the fort and wished he'd left more. "So that means you fell in the freezing water about a week ago..."

"Will?"

"I felt it," said Will.

"Felt it?"

"Yeah, I was in Mr. Clarke's class and suddenly felt cold. He made me go to the nurse's office. But I felt fine a little later. I wouldn't let her call mom, because I somehow knew that I wasn't really sick."

"Felt it," Eleven repeated thoughtfully. "Will?"

"Yeah?"

"I-I took your bag. Can't draw like you, but wanted to keep your pictures. I'm sorry."

Will shrugged. "I was wondering what happened to that, but I'm glad you have it, El."

Eleven smiled. "Me too."

"Will? Will, wake up!" Eleven vanished as Will's eyes snapped open. He felt a little disoriented, but his mother quickly came into focus in front of him. She looked frightened and worried. Will saw Mike and Jonathan standing just behind her with the same look.

Joyce and Jonathan had been worried about Will since his outburst that morning (though Jonathan was also worried about something seeming to frighten Will the night before). They had figured that it was the result of a lot of pent up emotion, but seeing him sitting on the floor with his eyes closed, but moving as though in some sort of REM state and not responding to them, made them fear it was

something more. Mike felt the same way, though he was remembering the incident when he'd suddenly gotten cold at school a week earlier.

Joyce worried that Will might need help, but wasn't sure who she could trust to get him the sort of help he needed. Will seemed a little confused at first-or perhaps in shock. "Will, Baby, what's going on? You weren't answering when we were calling and then we find you sitting on the floor in some sort of trance."

"I-I didn't mean to scare anyone," said Will. He stood up and put his hand on the wall to help steady himself. "I'm alright, I promise."

"Whoa, Bud, take it easy," said Jonathan as he and Mike stepped forward and took Will's arms. He was trembling.

"C'mon, let's get you to the sofa," said Mike.

"Yes, that's a good idea," said Joyce.

Will seemed to be in some sort of daze as his family guided him to the living room. They set him on the sofa. Joyce sat next to Will, wrapped her arms around him and began to gently rock him as she caressed his hair. Jonathan draped a blanket over him as Mike sat on the end of the couch.

"Whatever's going on, we'll get you through this, Will," said Joyce.

"It's nothing bad," said Will. He seemed to be reacting to someone talking to him; someone who wasn't in the room. He leaned further into his mother then reached up and took her hand. He glanced at Jonathan then looked directly at Mike.

"It's El, she's alive and hiding with someone she's calling a new friend," said Will. "She's talking to me right now."

Joyce tightened her grip protectively around her younger son. She let out a small sob that was somewhere between disbelief and Joy. Will always did have an active imagination and he'd endured more trauma than any child should ever have to endure. "Are you sure, Baby?"

"I know it sounds crazy, but I'm sure. I was talking to her face to face

in-the in between- that's what she's calling it. I guess that's why you found me in a trance." Will looked at Mike again. "You did see her that night, Mike. You weren't imagining things. She saw the feds there then she came to our house, but they were here fixing the hole in the wall while we were at the hospital, so she stayed in Castle Byers for a while until her new friend found her."

Although Joyce felt a small amount of gratitude to the new group of agents and scientists at Hawkins Lab for trying to help Will with his unusual health problems and fixing the hole in the side of her house, she felt annoyance at them for being there while they were all at the hospital. They had made repairs without her knowledge or permission. Because of their timing, her long lost daughter hadn't felt safe going into the home she should have lived her whole life.

"We were so close, so close," said Joyce. She continued to rock Will and caressed his face. "Can she hear us?"

"Yes," said Will. "Every word. Mike, she heard us when we were outside, you were right. She's heard all along and she'll keep hearing." Will gave Mike a pointed look at the last sentence.

Joyce exchanged a look with Jonathan. Mike and Will always had a lot of secrets. He often talked to Mike about things which he wouldn't talk to anyone else.

"Will, honey, I want to say something to your sister. If it's weird for you, I understand," said Joyce.

"It's okay, Mom," said Will. Joyce continued to hold and cradle Will hoping somehow that her daughter could feel it.

"El, we've lost so much time with you, so much," said Joyce tearfully. "When we saw you disappear, we thought we'd lost it all. I had only just found out you were my daughter and you were gone. Now we find out you're alive on Christmas Day. It's a miracle, sweetheart. I want you to know, that I'm so proud of you. You were in that terrible place since they stole you from us and you're still a good person. You're so brave and your instinct is to help people. I'm so proud of you, so proud. I want you to know we're gonna get you home with us where you belong. I have no idea how, but we'll figure it out."

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a/n: Yikes, I was originally going to include all this in the last chapter and they've been my longest chapters.

In this and my other stories, Eleven can see and communicate with Will without using radios. She had to use a little more effort when she talked to him in the void, but in general, it takes very little effort and they're figuring it out. Also, Will isn't puking up slugs in this story because he got out before the vine got stuck in his throat. He didn't spend four days in the Upside Down in this story, so he still has the link that leads to now memories, but they have a little more information this time.

11. Chapter 11

Chapter Eleven

"El, are you alright?" asked Hopper as he gently shook her. She opened her eyes and looked at him. He noticed that she seemed slightly upset. "What's going on? Were you checking up on your brother again? Is Will alright?"

Eleven stared at the floor hearing Mike's voice saying "Friends don't lie" in her head. Hopper had proven himself to be her friend. "I-I'm sorry. I had to."

"You had to what?" asked Hopper gently.

"Will was hurting, he was really hurting. I had to tell him I'm okay," said Eleven. "I didn't tell them where I am, just told them I'm okay."

Hopper took a deep breath, sat in a chair and put his face in his hands.

"Are-you mad?" asked Eleven cautiously. Hopper looked up and shook his head. Knowing that Sarah was out there and alive, he couldn't blame Eleven for wanting to contact her family and let them know she was alright. He'd give anything to hear from Sarah.

"No, kid, I'm not mad. Your family has every right to know you're okay. Just promise you'll be careful. Your family is being watched and so is Mike's."

"Watched?"

Hopper nodded. "There are some powerful people who suspect you're still alive and they don't want to let you just go and live with your family, understand?"

"I understand."

"I will get you safely back to your family, kid, I promise. I just need to find out who we can trust and who can help us." Hopper handed Eleven a bag filled with packages. "Merry Christmas, kid."

Eleven had heard her family using the work 'presents' in reference to similar packages for Will. "Will didn't want to open his presents today. He was too sad."

"Yeah, well, he probably won't be as sad anymore knowing you're safe," said Hopper. "You did the right thing by letting him know. Now, go ahead and open your presents. I'll fix you up something to eat and then you can get some sleep. We have a big day of cleaning up the cabin tomorrow. And I found something in your room at the lab. If you don't want it, I understand."

Hopper pulled out Eleven's old stuffed lion- the item that had been her only comfort for so many years. Knowing that Will had one just like it, made it that much more special. Eleven smiled, took the lion and hugged it. Hopper ruffled her hair.

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Joyce was unable to sleep that night. She felt a certain amount of elation knowing that her daughter was alive and- for the moment- safe. She also felt frustration with the fact that Eleven had to hide and that certain people were also watching Will. The living room was filled with boxes of items people in town had gotten for Will. She had finally been able to talk Will into opening his Christmas presents. He'd gotten an Atari with a few game. He and Mike at set it up and played it for a few hours. It gave Joyce some comfort to see Will enjoying himself for the first time in a while.

Jonathan had spent the evening trying out his new camera. He seemed to want to take pictures for Eleven's sake. He, like Will, was in better spirits than Joyce had seen him in a long time once he learned that his newly discovered sister was safe.

Joyce finished her chamomile tea, set the cup in the sink and walked down the hallway. She leaned on the door frame. A small amount of moonlight illuminated Will's face. He seemed to be sleeping peacefully. Joyce began to formulate a plan in her head. Why if she had Will contact Eleven and meet them somewhere. They could all go to a new town and start a new life.

Joyce's eyes drifted to Mike, who was curled up on the floor in his

sleeping bag. Her head was flooded with all the problems of running away to start a new life. Where would they go? How would they keep themselves safe? Were would they get the money? And finally, could she take Will away from his friends?

Joyce walked over to Will's bed and knelt beside him. He was clutching his old stuffed lion. She caressed his forehead, hoping she wouldn't wake him. "We'll figure this out, Baby. I have no idea how, but we'll figure it out."

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Over the next few months, Will was taken to Hawkins lab for regular check ups. It wasn't Joyce's first choice, knowing her daughter had been a prisoner there, but she didn't have much of a choice. How many doctors knew how to treat a child who had poisoning from breathing the toxic air of an alternate dimension for four days. Will's recovery had been stunted because he had used his abilities so soon after returning and not having enough time to fully recover according to Dr. Owens.

Hopper always accompanied Joyce and Will to the appointments. He had never wanted them to go into that place alone and having Eleven living with him had significantly increased that feeling. Eleven didn't want he brother and mother in that place, even though the new people didn't seem as bad as Papa's people.

Will experienced a couple of brief flashes into the Upside Down. They only lasted a couple of seconds, so he convinced himself they were just in his head. Part of him felt like he should tell Mike and his family, but he didn't want to worry them. Dr. Owens said that he was likely to experience PTSD after everything that had happened. He decided that he would talk to Eleven if and only if they got significantly worse.

One day in mid March, Will was sitting in the exam room with his mother and brother. Hopper had gone to talk to the doctors. "I'm going to find out what's going on," said Joyce after a few minutes. "Jonathan, stay with Will."

Joyce headed down the hall. She knew that Hopper was likely talking

about the cover ups with Dr. Owens, but she hated being in the building and hated her son's being in the building.

"Chief, this will all be easier if you and Joyce Byers trust me," Joyce heard Dr. Owens saying as she was about to knock on the door of his office.

"Why should we?" asked Hopper. "Your people are still treating her missing daughter like a fugitive and trying to convince her to turn over her son."

"They think the girl is dangerous. It's not easy for me to convince them otherwise when she did kill a lot of people that night," said Dr. Owens.

"She killed people who had imprisoned her most of her life," said Hopper. "And those people were trying to kill all of us. They people calling her dangerous are the dangerous ones."

"I personally agree with you, but I'm between a rock and a hard place. It's one thing to keep them away from Will, but it's something else to keep them away from his sister. I'm doing what I can. What is it going to take for you to trust me?"

"For the millionth time: getting them to leave Joyce and her kids alone, getting all of those kids Brenner and the others kidnapped back to their parents and bringing my daughter back to me."

Joyce froze. Had Hopper said what she thought he had said?

"We may be making some progress with that," said Dr. Owens. Joyce heard him ruffling through some papers. "Does this girl look like Sarah?"

"Where was this?"

"It was a party for Tess corp. Apparently, people were claiming she was Argus Tess' granddaughter, but she doesn't look like him and no one had seen her before or since. None of the Tess family recognized her and apparently, one of their designs went missing,"

"You don't know where she is now?" asked Hopper.

"This is the first lead," said Dr. Owens. "Do you think this girl could be Sarah?"

Hopper paused. "I know it's her. I remember that birthmark on her neck."

"Okay, we'll follow up on this lead," said Dr. Owens.

"That'll go a long way to earning my trust," said Hopper. "And see what you can do about getting them-whomever they are-to leave Joyce and her kids alone while you're at it."

"Will do," said Dr. Owens. "Here are Will's test results from today. Take these to Joyce and I'll be over in a few minutes to discuss them with her."

Joyce quickly stepped to the side so she wouldn't be visible when Hopper opened the office door. He noticed she was there as he closed it. He gestured for her to follow. When they were out of earshot, Hopper asked:

"How much did you hear?"

"Enough," said Joyce. "Sarah's still alive?"

"Yeah," said Hopper as he briefly fidgeted with Will's paperwork then handed it to her. "Brenner's people faked her death. It seems to be a pattern with them, but they experimented on me and some other men in my platoon without our knowledge and Sarah ended up with abilities. A couple of the agents told me before they tried to kill me that night."

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Joyce.

"You've got more than enough to worry about already, Joyce."

"That doesn't mean I wouldn't want to help you," said Joyce. "Is there anything else you're not telling me?"

Hopper stopped and looked at Joyce carefully. "I have a few secrets I'm keeping from you. I don't want to keep them, but I have to for now. You might be angry with me when you find out what they, but I

have to keep those secrets for now."

"You aren't helping the lab poison the town's water supply, are you?" asked Joyce.

"Nothing like that," said Hopper.

"Then what?" asked Joyce.

"You'll find out soon enough," said Hopper.

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Back in the cabin, Eleven pulled off her blindfold and wiped the blood from her nose. If she was communicating with Will, she didn't need to do anything that caused a nosebleed, but she had decided to follow her mother and see what the doctor said about Will. She had not expected to learn that Hopper had a daughter that Papa had kidnapped.

Eleven knew she could find Sara, but she needed a picture. She tried to think where one might be. She remembered seeing Hopper putting some old boxes into the floor late one night. She paced back and forth trying to think where the hole in the floor might be, then realized it must be hidden somewhere. She began to wave her arms to move the furniture. The chair got caught on something and tipped over. Eleven noticed a hole in one of the boards. She stuck her finger in and lifted it up. She leaned over and saw the boxes. One of them was indeed marked "Sarah."

Eleven crawled into the space under the floor and heaved the box up. She began flipping through stick drawings that were a lot like the ones she had done at the lab. She finally found some envelopes with pictures. There was a little girl with blond hair and pigtails. Eleven turned the radio back on and put on her blindfold.

She quickly found herself in the void. There was a blond haired girl about the same age as her, Mike, and Will. She was sitting on a bed and staring off into space. Eleven started to approach her, but was pulled from the void with the sound of Hopper's secret knock. Eleven pulled off her blindfold and stared at the door. She decided to

confront Hopper directly. She jerked her head and unlatched the locks.

Hopper entered and stopped dead in his tracks when he noticed that Sarah's box was open. Eleven held up Sarah's picture. "I-I saw her in a room. I can help find her."

"How did you know?" asked Hopper.

"Was checking on my Mom and she heard, so I heard. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I didn't want to use you, kid," said Hopper as he took Sarah's picture back and ran his fingers over it.

"U-use me?"

"Yeah, I know myself and I want my daughter back more than anything. If I let you help, it could put you in danger. You've already been through enough. So have your mother and brothers."

"But I want to help," said Eleven earnestly. Hopper sat on the sofa and started wringing his hands. He looked at Eleven.

"You say you saw Sarah in a room, do you know where the room is?"

"Not yet, if I could go-" Eleven pointed at the front door. Hopper shook his head.

"Like I said, I want to find Sarah more than anything, but I'm not going to put you in danger to get her back. Understand?"

Eleven stared at the floor and nodded sadly. "Yes." Hopper stood up and put his hand on her shoulder.

"I appreciate that you want to help. It shows that you're a caring person. This Dr. Owens seems to want to help all of us, I'm just not sure about his bosses. Maybe we can work something out soon so it'll be safe for you to be with your family. I'm going to keep working at that-" Hopper stopped and looked at the hatch door to the crawl space thoughtfully. "Hang on a second, kid, I may have an idea."

Hopper went down into the crawl space and came back up carrying a large paper book.

"What's that?" asked Eleven.

"This is a directory for southern Indiana. If you saw the address in here, do you think you could tell if Sarah is there?"

"Maybe," said Eleven. She'd done something similar a few times at the lab.

"How about you look through this while I'm at work during the day. I'll see if I can check out more directories from the library. This could be a way for you to help find Sarah without putting yourself at risk."

"I can do that," said Eleven. She started to open the directory, but Hopper took it back.

"Not yet. We're going to have some dinner, then you're going to get some rest. Got it?"

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Will hadn't felt like having a party for his 13th birthday. He had agreed to more for Eleven's sake as she had never gotten to experience a birthday. Eleven had seen Lucas, Dustin and Mike's birthday parties through Will and had a lot of questions about birthdays. They were having his party in Mike's basement because the Byers house wasn't big enough for all the the guests and it wasn't warm enough for an outdoor party yet.

The main reason that Will didn't want to have a party was because people stared at him all the time. Before he had disappeared into the Upside Down, most people ignored him. He'd always been fine with that as he didn't like attention. He had to constantly fight the desire to use his invisibility as extended periods of it made him sick.

Will was the point of contact for his mother, brother and Mike to talk to Eleven. They'd give him extra hugs then whisper something meant for his sister. Will was starting to feel as though he was intruding on private moments between his sister and the others. He was beginning to feel frustrated, but also feel guilty for being frustrated. He was the

only way for anyone to communicate with Eleven at that moment and no one was at fault for that.

Sometimes, when he was alone in his room late at night and he was certain that Eleven was no longer watching him, he would curl up under his blankets and cry in frustration. His frustration with his situation and not talking about it because he didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings was made worse by his occasional momentary flashes to the Upside Down. He normally would have at least told Mike about something like that, but didn't want to bother him. He really didn't want to tell the doctors at Hawkins Lab about it as he feared it would give them the excuse they needed to take him away from his mother.

On his thirteenth birthday, his momentary flashes to the Upside Down became what everyone would refer to as episodes. In his last class of the day, his teacher Miss Davey had decided that she'd have the class sing Happy Birthday. Will put on a brave face, but wanted to sink into the floor and disappear. Eleven had told him she was working on something, so Will went under the table in the A.V. room to cry in frustration. It felt empty when people who had repeatedly demonstrated that they did not care about him wished him a happy birthday. The attention caused him anxiety.

"Will," said Mike as he broke Will out of his thoughts. "What are you doing in here? Are you okay? Is El okay?"

Will crawled out from under the table and wiped his eyes. "El's fine."

"Are **you** fine? What happened?"

"Nothing. I'm just tired of everyone staring at me all the time and they're doing it a lot more than usual today," said Will.

"We couple wait in here for a few minutes if you want," said Mike. Will shook his head.

"My Mom will be here soon. I don't want her to worry." Will headed to the hallway, but Mike grabbed his arm.

"Will, wait-"

"Mike, please, not now. I just can't," said Will.

Mike nodded and released Will's arm. "Alright, but I'm here for you if you need me."

"I know," said Will. They walked to their lockers.

"Well, if it isn't Fairy and Frog Face."

"Not, now, Troy. Back off!" said Mike through gritted teeth. He tapped Will's shoulder and gestured to indicate that they should keep walking. Will complied.

"I still owe," said Troy maliciously. Mike and Will remained silent. "And since it seems to bug you more when something happens to the fairy than when it happens to you yourself-"

Mike started to react when he understood Troy's implication, but he wasn't quick enough. Troy shoved an unsuspecting Will as hard as he could, causing the smaller boy to fly forward and slam onto the hard floor and the contents of his book bag to spill onto the floor. Several of their classmates gasped in horror. Mike angrily swung his back pack and hit Troy in the face with it sending him reeling,

"You're gonna pay for that, Wheeler!" said Troy when he regained his balance. He started toward Mike, but Lucas and Dustin who happened to be at the other end of the hall when Troy shoved Will, charged at Troy and knocked him to the floor. Mike stared in awe for a moment. He and his friends had become much more bold since taking on an inter-dimensional monster and a bunch of federal agents, the school bullies were considerably less intimidating.

Mike turned to see Will cradling his right arm (which looked broken) and inching backward until he was against the wall. Mike noticed that Will's head was bleeding. He was looking around with a terrified expression. It was as though he didn't see the other students. Mike rushed to his side. "Will!" Mike grabbed Will's shoulder. Will seemed to snap out of whatever trance he was in. "Will, what happened? Are you okay?"

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12. Chapter 12

Chapter 12

"It's not a problem at all," said Bob. "I'm off tomorrow. I can sit with Will while you're at work."

"I can't ask you to do that," said Joyce. She glanced back at Will who was laying in his hospital bed and staring blankly at the ceiling while Mike and Jonathan sat beside him. He had broken his wrist, fractured a couple of ribs and had a slight concussion. The doctors were keeping him in the hospital for a few days (causing them to have to cancel his birthday party and Will seemed to have no interest in rescheduling it) and had him on some pain medication.

"You're not asking, I'm volunteering," said Bob.

"It's just that since the incident, he's been very stressed. It could be a lot for you to deal with."

"I can handle it, I promise," said Bob. "He's a good kid going through a difficult time. I can relate."

"Okay," said Joyce. "But call me right away if anything happens."

"I'll do that," said Bob.

"You're having Bob sit with Will tomorrow?" asked Jonathan after Bob left. "We barely know him."

"I went to school with him and have worked next door to him for years," said Joyce. "And I don't have a lot of options, do I?"

"It's okay," said Will as he spoke in the first time in what felt like forever. "I like Bob. He's nice."

"He's lame," Jonathan groaned. He hadn't said it out loud, but he worried his mother was seeing Bob in an effort to bring stability in their lives. Joyce shot Jonathan a warning look.

"Then so am I," said Will.

"Will, you're not lame," said Jonathan.

"Yes I am," said Will. "I did absolutely nothing today while my friends protected me from Troy."

"Will, that wasn't your fault," said Mike. "Troy attacked you because he was trying to get back at me. Besides, you broke bones when you hit the floor, there was nothing you could do!"

"There being nothing I could do seems to be the case a lot," said Will as he stared out the window.

"What does that even mean?" asked Jonathan.

"Nothing, forget it," said Will.

"Will, you're not weak. You've literally done things that have save all our lives," said Mike earnestly. Will pushed himself against his pillows as though trying to make himself disappear into them.

"Will, Baby, what is it?" asked Joyce as she caressed his forehead. "You haven't touched that birthday cake Mrs. Wheeler made for you or opened any of your presents-" Joyce indicated a few birthday presents that people had brought to the hospital for Will, including a couple that Bob had brought over. Will glanced at the cake and the gifts then turned away and closed his eyes as tight as he could.

"Nothing," said Will. "I'm just not hungry, I'm in a lot of pain, and I'm really tired. Can I just go to sleep, please?"

"Do you want us to leave?" asked Joyce. Will opened his eyes and glanced at his mother, brother, and best friend.

"No. I'm sorry. I just feel like crap, that's all."

Mike found himself wishing more than ever that Eleven was there with them. He knew that there was something going on with Will, especially after finding him in the AV room that afternoon. Dustin and Lucas had been noticing Will's odd behavior as well, but figured it was simply the result of him having gone through a lot recently. Mike knew it had to be something more. Usually, Will would tell Mike everything, but he wasn't talking about whatever had

frightened him in the hallway after Troy shoved him. Mike was certain that Eleven would be able to get Will to open up if she was there. He knew that the twins could communicate telepathically, but it wasn't the same as talking in person.

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Eleven was heavily bundled up as she and Hopper entered Hawkins General through a side door. She was wearing a black wig that Hopper had picked up. He thought it made her resemble Joyce more than ever as he was strongly reminded of his and Joyce's days at Hawkins Middle. Eleven had originally been an innocent child that Hopper wanted to protect. Losing Sarah had made him very protective of children. But knowing she was Joyce's daughter made him want to protect her that much more.

Hopper unscrewed a bolt on the drinking fountain. He pointed to a nearby closet. "Hide in there, El. While I'm showing the nurse this leaky fountain, head down the hall to your brother's room. Do you know where it is?"

"Yeah," said Eleven. "I saw." Eleven wanted to tell Hopper that she could find Sarah the same way if he'd allow her to leave the cabin to do so.

Eleven hid inside a closet as Hopper approached the nurse's station. "Hey, Elaine, how are you doing tonight?"

"What are you doing here at this hour, Chief?" asked Elaine.

"Couldn't sleep," said Hopper. "I wanted to make sure no one was giving Will Byers any trouble after what happened today."

"I just checked on him and his family a couple minutes ago and they were all asleep," said Elaine. "We're keeping him here for a few days. Apparently those toxins he was exposed to at the lab last fall caused a few bones to break more easily than they normally would have. We got him to admit he was spitting out the pills that the new people were giving him. We did have the medication analyzed and it's real, so he might start taking it now."

"Hopefully, that'll get him better," said Hopper. "By the way, did you know that water fountain over there is leaking? If you have a toolbox, I can fix it."

"Shit, not again," said Elaine. When she went to grab the toolbox, Eleven darted past the station and down the hall to Will's room. Will was sleeping in his bed. Eleven saw her mother, Jonathan, and Mike asleep in chair. Panic gripped her. She wanted to wake them up and talk to them more than anything, but felt scared.

Eleven stopped by Mike's chair. She reached for his face, but stopped as her hand hovered an inch from his cheek. She stood completely still for a minute, then pulled off her wig and walked over to Will's bed and sat beside him. His forehead was bandaged as well as his right arm. Eleven wiped tears from her eyes as she had the urge to do a lot more to Troy than make him pee himself. She had seen a lot of people hurt her brother, not just physically.

Joyce woke up in her chair at that moment. She felt thirsty and decided to go and get some water to drink. She glanced over at Will and noticed he wasn't alone. She thought she was imagining things and slowly stood up and walked around Will's bed. Sure, Eleven's hair had grown, but it was undoubtedly her in the flesh.

"El," said Joyce as she knelt beside her daughter and put her hand on the little girl's shoulder. Eleven slowly turned and faced her.

"Mom," said Eleven as she tearfully addressed her mother as 'Mom' while they were physically in the same room for the first time ever. Joyce pulled her into a tight embrace. Eleven returned it full force as they were both making up for lost time.

"You're here, you're really here, sweetheart! Oh, my girl, my sweet baby girl. We've missed you so much. I *love* you so much, so so much!" It felt good for Joyce to be able to say those things directly to her daughter. Saying them through Will had been better than nothing, but it wasn't the same. It just didn't feel right saying 'I love you' to Eleven when Will was her child who was physically standing in front of her. "How did you get here?"

"I had to see Will," said Eleven. "My friend helped me, but I can't stay

long. My friend doesn't want me in danger."

"What do you mean, your friend doesn't want you in danger, sweetheart?" asked Joyce.

"The bad people are still somewhere," said Eleven. "My friend needs help with something. I can help him, but he won't let me because he said he doesn't want to put me in danger."

Joyce could have sworn she saw Eleven's eyes widen as though she realized she'd said too much. Eleven quickly hugged Joyce again and started crying. "I don't like hiding, I want to come home," Eleven sobbed.

"I want you to come home more than anything," said Joyce as she held her daughter. "I'll figure something out and make it happen somehow, I promise."

Joyce and Eleven both heard light footsteps behind them. They looked up to see a stunned Jonathan.

Eleven released Joyce and hugged Jonathan, who took a couple of seconds to return the hug. "Hey, there, little sister," said Jonathan.

Their talking and crying tears of joy soon woke Mike. It took him a moment to remember he was in Will's hospital room. When he heard crying, he felt panic and briefly worried that Will's condition may have worsened. He had heard the doctors telling Mrs. Byers that the toxins (from the Upside Down) had caused Will's bones to break more easily than they normally would have.

Mike looked over at Will's bed to see his friend fast asleep and clearly breathing. The machines monitoring his vitals looked normal. Mike looked just past Will's bed to see Jonathan and Mrs. Byers hugging a figure who was about the same size as Will. It couldn't be. Mike's heart jumped into his throat. He slowly stood up and crept carefully around Will's bed until he was standing directly behind Jonathan, who was hugging the very person Mike had been longing to see for over four months.

Eleven glanced over Jonathan's shoulder to see Mike standing there.

They rushed to each other in a couple steps and embraced. Mike was her first friend. He was the only conscious person in the room that she'd had a chance to spend an significant time with prior to disappearing and she had only spent a few days with him. Feeling love for everyone in the room can easily and naturally for Eleven.

Prior to escaping the lab, Eleven didn't understand love. No one had shown her love and she had not felt it. It was a concept that she understood very quickly after meeting Mike, Will, and the others.

Eleven was about to tell the others that she needed to talk to Will when he woke up with a moan. Joyce was instantly at his side. "Mom?" said a slightly dazed Will.

"Are you alright, Baby?" asked Joyce as she caressed his head.

Will shrugged. "What time is it?"

"It's a little before 2 in the morning. You have a visitor, sweetheart. Your sister's here."

"El?" said Will. He looked past Joyce to Eleven who was still hugging Mike. "How?"

"I-I had to see you, Will," said Eleven. She went to his side, standing next to Joyce who put a hand on her shoulder. Will pushed himself up with his good arm and winced at the pain in his ribs.

"Take it easy," said Joyce as she propped up Will's pillows behind him. Eleven lightly ran her fingers over the bandage on Will's head before leaning over and carefully hugging him. Will returned the hug as best as he could with one broken arm and a couple of cracked ribs. He'd been about to communicate with his sister using telepathy for the last three months, but it wasn't the same as having her there.

"I need to speak to Will alone," said Eleven.

"What?" said Will. "El, you can talk to me any time you want. You haven't been able to talk directly to Mike, Mom, or Jonathan in months."

"I need to talk to you alone, Will," said Eleven pointedly.

"C'mon, let's give them a few minutes," said Jonathan.

"You don't want to have a birthday party," said Eleven after Joyce closed the hospital room door.

"Is that what you wanted to talk about?" asked Will.

"No," said Eleven. "But I can tell that birthday stuff is making you sad."

"You've never gotten to have a birthday," said Will. "It's not fair."

"Not your fault, Will. Things that make you sad won't make me happy. Understand?" Will nodded. Eleven looked at some birthday presents near the bed. "And you deserve those."

"I'm going to still be in here Saturday anyway," said Will. "So, what *did* you want to talk about?"

"I saw," said Eleven.

"Saw what? When Troy shoved me?"

"More than that," said Eleven. "I saw what you saw. I saw the Upside Down."

Will's eyes widened in alarm and he frantically shook his head. "No, that wasn't real. It's just in my head. Nothing's trying to get me," Will said desperately. Eleven took his good hand into hers.

"Something is there, Will. It's real and I felt it," said Eleven. Tears started pouring down Will's cheeks and Eleven carefully hugged him. "You're not alone, Will."

"What can we do?" asked Will.

"Let people help," said Eleven. "We can tell Mike. He can pull you out when you see the Upside Down. I saw. And tell Mom and Jonathan."

"I can't put them through this," said Will.

"Will," said Eleven as she caressed his cheek. "Let them help."

Will closed his eyes. "Okay."

"I have a secret I need to tell you because I need your help," said Eleven.

"What is it?" asked Will.

"Hopper's daughter, she's still alive. She's like us and the bad people have her."

"How do you know?"

"I saw her," said Eleven. "Hopper won't let me leave the cabin to find her, but you can help me. He said he doesn't want me to put myself in danger."

"Hopper's the friend who's been helping you," Will stated. Eleven nodded.

"Don't tell Mom and Jonathan. Don't even tell Mike yet. It's not safe."

"How can I help you?"

"You have to get better," said Eleven. "Rest and take the medicine Dr. Owens gives you."

"How do we know he isn't trying to control me with that medicine?"

"He's not one of the bad people. He's trying to help. I saw. Will, please get better. We have to save Sarah.

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Joyce fumbled for change in her pockets to get cans of soda for everyone while Jonathan and Mike stood outside of Will's hospital room. She knew there was something more going on with Will than physical injuries and hoped that Eleven could get him to open up.

"Trouble sleeping?" asked Elaine as she approached the vending machine to get herself something to drink.

"Something like that," said Joyce.

"Does Will need anything? I could bring him something to help him sleep."

"Oh, no, he's fine all things considered. I'm just picking up something to drink," said Joyce hastily. She wanted to spend as much time with her daughter as possible and that time could be cut short if Elaine or anyone else went to Will's room.

"The chief was worried that one of those bullies might try to pay Will and unwanted visit," said Elaine.

"What?" asked Joyce.

"He stopped by to check on your family. He must have been having trouble sleeping as well."

Joyce nearly dropped the sodas she was carrying. Hopper was the friend who was helping Eleven. That was the secret he told her would cause her to be angry with him.

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It was the very beginning of spring and the ground was thawing. Inside the coffin of Barbara Holland, the tiny slug like creatures thawed out as well. They knew it wasn't time to move yet as it was getting warmer and HE liked it cold. When it started getting colder again, it would be time to move, time to burrow, time to grow, time to kill.

13. Chapter 13

Chapter 13

"You're getting stronger there, Sir Will," said Dr. Owens as Will squeezed the gripping device. Will suppressed the urge to roll his eyes as people tended to talk to him like he was younger than he actually was.

"I feel better," said Will.

"You're still taking those vitamins and antibiotics, aren't you?" asked Dr. Owens.

"Yeah," said Will. "But being outside on sunny days seems to help even more. When I was outside on sunny days, it felt like my broken bones were healing faster."

"A little natural vitamin D always helps," said Dr. Owens.

"There have been couple times where he got really sick for a minute when he went outside this past week," said Joyce as she rubbed Will's shoulder.

"It's not a big deal, Mom," said Will.

"Will, we're dealing with a lot of things we didn't even know existed a year ago," said Joyce. "We don't know what is and isn't a big deal and we can't take any chances."

"We've had the first hot weather of the year," said Hopper.

"He likes it cold," Will muttered.

"What?" asked Dr. Owens.

"Who?" asked Hopper.

"Huh?" said Will.

"Who likes it cold, sweetie?" asked Joyce gently. Will bit his lip.

"It's okay, Will," said Eleven's voice in his head.

"I'm not sure," said Will. "When I was in the Upside Down, there was something else there; something much worse than the demogorgan. It was just pure evil."

"Did you see this pure evil thing?" asked Dr. Owens.

"No," said Will. "But I felt it. It was after me."

"How do you know it was after you?" asked Dr. Owens.

"Just a feeling," said Will.

"Have you felt it recently?" asked Dr. Owens? Will shook his head. "Well, if he likes it cold, he might be taking a break for the summer. It seems that way, at least."

"What do you mean, doc?" asked Hopper.

"The substances around the gate haven't been active since it started getting warmer. We still can't seal it though," said Dr. Owens.

"So he could come back?" asked Will.

"Not if we can help it," said Dr. Owens.

"My sister could stop it," said Will. "She'd probably come back to help if they'd stop treating her like a fugitive." He felt his mother's gently grip on his shoulder.

Dr. Owens pushed a button that turned off the recording equipment. "If it were up to me, she wouldn't be a fugitive. If you do here from her, keep her hidden and don't tell me. I need some plausible deniability."

Joyce avoided Hopper's gaze as she herself was practicing her own plausible deniability.

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"Thanks for letting me borrow your bike, Lucas," said Will as he and

Mike were about to head out for Hopper's cabin.

"Any time," said Lucas. "Are you sure you're going to be alright."

"Yeah, it's almost summer," said Will. "And we know I thrive in the summer." Will held out his hand in the sunlight. then angled it causing the flowers and tomatoes on the side of the Sinclair house to grow. It was a recently discovered ability and didn't cause nosebleeds for Will.

"Hurry back," said Dustin. "Your mom will freak out if you aren't here when she calls a million times today."

"I told her I'll be meditating a lot today, that should buy some time," said Will.

"What does that even mean?" asked Dustin.

"It'll work," said Mike. Will had learned how to go into the void so he could speak to Eleven face to face. It took a lot more effort than simple telepathy and Mrs. Byers knew that so she tended to leave Will alone when he was in the void.

"And what if your mother calls, Mike?" asked Dustin.

"She bought two bottles of wine and a new book yesterday, she won't call," said Mike.

"I just wish you guys would tell us what you're doing," said Dustin. "We could get grounded for the rest of our lives if our parents find out we let Will go off... somewhere."

"We want to tell you," said Will. "It's just too dangerous."

"That's not making us feel better about not knowing where you'll be," said Lucas.

"We'll tell you as soon as it's safe," said Will. "But we won't be in any danger today... well we won't be in as much danger as we were last November."

It took Mike and Will a couple hours to get to Hopper's cabin, but they were there before 11 am. Eleven eagerly greeted them at the

door before they even knocked. She hugged them both at once. While she liked being able to use telepathy with Will or talk to him in the in between, seeing her brother in person was much better. She hadn't seen Will, Mike or anyone else aside from Hopper since the night she went to the hospital to see them. She hadn't been outside the cabin since that night.

"This place is a lot cleaner than it was last fall," said Mike as he looked around the cabin.

"We did a lot of cleaning, but nobody knows about this place," said Eleven. "Sit down, Will."

"Huh?" said Will as he was glancing at the books on the book shelf.

"Sit down," Eleven repeated. "You need to rest before we get Sarah." Will opened his mouth to object, but decided not to argue. He leaned his head on the back of the couch and closed his eyes. He did feel a little tired from the long trip and it wasn't quite as easy to ride a bike in the woods as it was on pavement.

Will heard Mike helping Eleven in the kitchen. Will opened his eyes and glanced in their direction to see them kissing. He shut his eyes again and decided to pretend to sleep. If Eleven had been kissing any other guy, Will may have felt the need to warn that guy to not hurt his sister. But it was Mike. Will trusted Mike more than anyone.

Mike was thinking something similar at that moment. Mike felt the need to reassure Will that he would never hurt his sister. Maybe it was the fact that Will was the first person in Mike's life that he had ever truly trusted; but it was important to Mike that he continued to earn Will's trust. Having Will become his friend when they were five years old was also the first time in Mike's life that he hadn't felt alone. That was why Mike had taken Will's apparent death a lot harder than either Dustin or Lucas.

Will suddenly jumped off the couch and ran to the kitchen, startling Mike who feared for a brief moment that Will was angry at him for kissing Eleven. That was ridiculous, of course.

"Is something wrong?" asked Eleven. Will shook his head.

"Not exactly. I just thought... what if there are cameras in Sarah's room recording everything."

"The bad people might see you and El getting her out," said Mike. Will nodded.

"We should disguise ourselves," said Will. "El, does Hopper have any tarps here?"

"T-tarps?"

"They're sort of like heavy blankets we use to cover things," said Will.

Eleven remembered uncovering a lot of stuff when she moved in to the cabin. She went to the floor hole to the storage area under the cabin and lifted the plank. The three of them covered everything in Eleven's room, including the windows with the sheets.

"Is there anything that we can use to disguise ourselves?" asked Mike.

"Maybe we don't need to," said Will.

"No, Will!" said Mike as he furiously shook his head. "No Way!"

"Mike, I have to. I'll be fine."

"You could make yourself sick again," said Mike.

"I know," said Will. "But Sara's still trapped and we have to get her out. Look, just get me outside when we're done. The sunlight seems to make me feel better."

Mike briefly considered knocking Will out and dragging him back home, but realized they'd come too far to stop now.

Will looked at Eleven. "Okay, I have an idea. You find Sara in your mind. When you do, show me the image of the room. I'll see where the cameras are and make the portal to an area where they can't record it. We go invisible and you destroy the cameras when we get there. Then we get Sarah out."

"I understand," said Eleven.

"Ready?" asked Will.

"Now?" asked Mike.

"Yes, now," said Will.

"We biked and walked a long way to get here. You need to rest," Mike protested.

"I'll be fine," said Will. "I'm ready. El, can you find Sarah?"

Eleven grabbed a radio, turned it on to static and closed her eyes. After a minute, she held out her hand and Will took it. He closed his eyes and allowed his mind to sync with his sister's. He was in a white room. A blonde haired girl about his age was curled up on a small bed and staring at nothing. Will's heart went out to her. He looked round the room and saw only one camera. He decided to make the portal right under it.

"Did you see it, El?"

"Yes."

"Can you take it out when we get in there?"

"Yes."

Will went to the wall, knelt on the floor, focused on making the portal. He felt the energy flowing through his hands. It seem to be much easier than it had been the previous fall. As the portal opened up, he saw Sarah curled on her bed just as he had in El's vision. She seemed to freeze a little as she started back at him. Eleven knelt behind him, looked at Sarah and held her finger to her lips. Sarah saw both of their noses bleeding and knew they were like her.

Eleven opened Will's portal the rest of the way as Mike stood to the side. When it was big enough, she took Will's hand. He focused and they became invisible. Sarah tried not to react. When they stepped through the portal, Eleven looked up at the camera, focused, and caused it to short out. She and Will became visible again. Sarah shot up. She was clutching a stuffed tiger.

"It's okay," said Will. "We're like you and we're getting you out of here."

"They'll come soon," said Sara.

"Then we'd better hurry," said Will as he held out his hand to her. He noticed a vent. "El, do you think you could take that off so they think she crawled through there?" Eleven nodded and removed the vent, which made a loud clang. "Let's hurry!" said Will as they heard the sounds of running feet in the hall.

The three MKUltra children stepped through the portal and Eleven closed it just in time. Sarah looked around the tarp covered room as she clutched her stuffed tiger. "W-who are you and where are we?" she asked as she slid down the wall and sat on the floor trembling.

Will knelt beside her. "I'm Will. Will Byers. This is my sister El and my best friend Mike Wheeler."

"Byers," said Sarah as though recalling something. "My dad had a friend named Joyce."

"Yeah, she's our mom," said Will.

"My Dad and my Mom... they left me... they left me," said Sarah as tears ran down her cheeks. Will shook his head.

"No, the bad people lied to your parents and made them think you died just like they made my mom think I died last year. Your Dad's been looking for you every since he helped my Mom save me and he found out you were still alive."

"Where is he?" asked Sarah.

"Not here," said Will. "He doesn't know we found you and got you out, but he'll be back from work later."

Sarah reached over and took Will's wrist. She turned it over to see that there was no number on it. Eleven quickly walked up and showed her own number. "The bad people didn't get Will when we were born, but they tried to get him last year."

Sarah's arm trembled as she held out her own wrist revealing a number 9.

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Will leaned against the tree as he felt the warmth of the sunlight on his skin. It seemed to make him stronger. He held out his hand and redirected the rays to make some wild flowers grow. Mike came out carrying a couple sandwiches and pops. He handed one of each to Will.

"Feeling better?"

"Yeah, much better," said Will as he took a bite of the roast beef sandwich. "Are they still talking?"

"Yep. It probably feels good for El to have another girl to talk to," said Mike. Will took a bite of his sandwich.

"I wonder if we can find other kids and get them out."

"El would have to know who they are to find them," said Mike. Will nodded.

"Maybe we can check the library. Hopper said he found information about Brenner there."

"Could El find Brenner. Maybe if we find him, we can find all the other kids," said Mike.

"She's terrified of him," said Will. "She can't focus when she tries to find him."

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"I know this place," said Sarah as she and Eleven stepped out into the living room after Eleven had given her some clothes to put on. Sarah still clutched her stuffed tiger, giving Eleven the urge to grab her own stuffed lion off her bed and hold it. "This is my Dad's old cabin. We came here once when I was really little."

"He's been hiding me from the bad people here," said Eleven. Sarah

touched the couch, closed her eyes, and started crying. "Are you okay?"

Sarah nodded. "I can see visions when I touch things. I'm psychic. I saw my Dad holding my picture and crying."

"I've seen him cry a lot," said Eleven. "He didn't know I could see him, but he missed you."

Sarah looked at Eleven. "They'll try to find me and take me back there again."

"They won't get you here, I promise."

"They used me to steal secrets from other companies," said Sarah. "They took me to parties and had me pretend to be some important person's kid. They threatened to hurt me if I didn't do what they said."

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"Is this the right place?" asked the truck driver. The girl nodded.

"Thank you, sir," she said as she opened the door to get out of the truck.

"Well, I'm sure your momma will be happy to see you again after all this time." The girl nodded and hopped out of the truck.

She threw her back pack over her shoulder and walked up the path to the old farm house. She took a deep breath and knocked on the door. "Jane Ives, my name is Jane Ives," said said as she brushed her light blonde hair from her eyes.

A brown haired woman opened the door. "Whatever you're sellin' I ain't buyin,' kid." She started to close the door and Jane waved her hand to make it fly open. The woman gaped at here.

"My name is Jane Ives and I'm looking for my mother Terry Ives." She held out her wrist to reveal the number 10.

14. Chapter 14

Chapter 14

"Will she get better?" asked Jane as she sat at the kitchen table with her Aunt Becky.

"I don't think so," said Becky.

"I think she did this to her when she tried to get me out of there," said Jane. "There's this memory I have, but I always thought it was a dream."

"How did you get out?" asked Becky.

"I used my powers," said Jane. It was a couple years ago, but I just ran.

"Where have you been all this time?"

"Where ever I could find a place to sleep. I met a lot of other runaway kids-not kids with powers, though."

"And how did you find us?"

"I had a vision about six months ago of my mom showing something to another woman. I remembered my mom from that memory I thought was a dream."

"There was a woman named Joyce Byers here with a Chief Hopper," said Becky. "Joyce's son went missing. Apparently Dr. Brenner and his people faked Will Byers' death." Becky grabbed a newspaper clipping and handed it to Jane. It had the headline : 'The Boy Who Came Back to Life.'

"Just like they did to me when I was born," said Jane. "If Papa's still alive, Will Byers isn't safe and neither am I. I have to leave."

"Wait," said Becky. "We're pretty far out in the country. You'll be safe here."

"Are you sure?" asked Jane.

"Yes," said Becky. She patted the newspaper clipping. "Maybe Joyce Byers and Chief Hopper can help us."

Jane glanced at her catatonic mother. "Alright. Do you know how to contact them?"

XX

"We have to head back soon," said Mike as he looked at his watch.

"Stay a little longer, please," Eleven begged. She was glad that at least she would have Sarah for company, but wanted to spend more time with Mike and Will.

"You broke your arm," said Sara to Will.

"How did you know?" asked Will.

"I saw it when you took my hand," said Sarah. "I'm psychic. I'm just glad that nothing bad has ever really happened in this cabin or I'd be having all kinds of visions now."

"Can you only see bad things?" asked Will. Sarah shook her head.

"Traumatic things just come to me much more quickly. I saw you drop a bunch of things and a girl with black hair helped you pick them up. Is she your girlfriend?"

Will remembered the day in early April, shortly after he returned from the hospital. He had been trying to gather up his art supplies by himself after the art club meeting. His fingers were still swollen and he couldn't quite grip everything with the cast still on his arm. Most of the other club members had already left the room, but Julie hadn't.

"She's not my girlfriend, she was just being nice," said Will.

Mike, who remembered how embarrassed both Will and Julie were the day she had helped him carry his stuff to the locker and several students made certain remarks, decided to change the subject.

"So the people who had you made you some sort of spy?" asked Mike.

"Something like that," said Sarah.

"Do you remember much of your life before it happened?" asked Mike.

"It's fading," said Sarah. "I was seven when they took me. I just remember being really sick and my Dad read to me a lot."

"He reads to me a lot now," said Eleven.

"Oh," said Sarah. She hugged her tiger and sank into the couch.

"So," said Mike. "What are you gonna tell Hopper when he gets home and sees his long lost daughter here?"

"I can just say I ran away and found my way back here," said Sarah as she glanced at Will. He had his face in his hands and was rubbing his forehead. "Are you alright, Will?" Mike and Eleven glanced at Will as well.

"I'm fine," said Will. "Just a little headache."

"Maybe you should take a quick nap before we head back," said Mike. Will glanced at Mike for a second, then nodded.

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Joyce leaned against the counter after the last customer from the early afternoon rush left the store.

"We made it through that one okay," said Jeffrey. Joyce nodded as Hopper entered the store.

"Good afternoon, Chief," said Donald. "Looking for anything in particular."

"I was just wondering if I could borrow Joyce for a few hours," said Hopper. "There's been a new development regarding her son and there are people who need to interview her."

"Will she make it in time to close tonight?" asked Donald.

"Of course," said Hopper.

Joyce punched her time card and followed Hopper to his truck. Whatever was happening couldn't have been too serious if Hopper was promising to have Joyce back later that day.

"What's going on, Hop?" asked Joyce when they were both in his truck.

"Remember Terry Ives?" Joyce nodded. "Her sister Becky just called me. Apparently Jane turned up and wants to talk to us."

"Should we get Will?" asked Joyce. Hopper shook his head.

"We can let him relax today and make sure they girl Jane is alright before we have Will meet her."

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"Thanks for coming," said Becky as she opened the door for Hopper and Joyce.

"Where is she?" asked Hopper as they stepped into the house and Becky shut the door behind them.

"In the living room with her mother, going through all those files Terry used to keep on missing kids," said Becky as she wiped tears from her eyes.

"Are you alright?" asked Joyce. Becky nodded.

"I should've believed my sister. Maybe would could have stopped Brenner years ago."

As they stepped into the living room, Terry was sitting in the same rocking chair Joyce and Hopper had seen her in the previous fall. She stared blankly ahead as a girl with light brown hair about the same age as Will and Eleven sat on the floor surrounded by files. She was holding a file and staring at it intensely.

"Jane?" said Becky. Jane looked up and noticed Joyce and Hopper. She got to her feet as she continued to clutch the file.

Joyce held out her hand as she approached Jane. "Hi, you must be Jane, I'm-"

"You're Joyce Byers," said Jane as she hesitated for a moment before shaking Joyce's hand. "I know. Your son is like me."

"Yes, my son and my daughter," said Joyce.

"Your daughter?" asked Becky. "You have a daughter? And Will is like Jane?"

"That's why they faked his death," said Joyce. "Something happened to me by that lab when I was a kid. My older son is normal, but the twins ended up having abilities and they took my daughter when she was born, just they they took Jane from Terry."

"So you understand," said Jane.

"I do," said Joyce.

"Do you know where your daughter is?" asked Becky.

"She has a telepathic link to my son," said Joyce. "She told him she'd hiding from Brenner's people with a friend." Joyce tried not to look at Hopper.

"So you hate Brenner as much as I do," said Jane.

"I want my daughter to be home and my son to be safe," said Joyce. "So, yes, I do hate Brenner. He tried to have us all killed and he's put my children and a lot of other children through hell."

"Where's your son now?" asked Jane.

"He's at his friend's house. I had to work today," said Joyce. "What's that file you have there."

Jane held up a picture of a young girl. There was a headline about her going missing. "She was with me in that place. We used to play

together, but they stopped taking me to the rainbow room one day... when they started to torture me and make me do things. I guess they didn't want any of the kids together once they started hurting us."

"I'm so sorry," said Joyce. Jane shrugged.

"Kali can help us stop them. I think I can find her, but she's far away right now."

"Did you see her?" asked Joyce.

"Yes, but I'd have to leave to find her," said Jane.

"Out of the question," said Hopper. "You should stay with your aunt, you're not safe out there. Those people are murders who kidnap kids and turn their parents' heads into mush." Hopper gestured at Terry.

"How am I supposed to stop them if I stay here? How am I supposed to find Kali?"

"Let us help you," said Hopper.

"How do I know I can trust you?" Jane asked Hopper. "I can trust her-" Jane pointed to Joyce. "Because they took her kids like they took me."

"They took my daughter too," said Hopper. "And they faked her death just like they fake yours. I'm a part of this too."

"I'm sorry," said Jane.

"You've got nothing to be sorry for, kid, you've been through hell," said Hopper. His face suddenly lit up like something occurred to him. "Maybe with some practice, you could find this Kali without leaving the safety of this place."

"What do you mean?" asked Jane. Hopper picked up the newspaper clipping with Will's picture and handed it to Jane. Becky had a map of Roane county. Hopper opened it and held it up.

"Will's a lot closer, maybe you can locate him on this map," said Hopper. He couldn't believe he hadn't thought of that before. Maybe

it was a way for Eleven to locate Sarah with leaving the safety of the cabin.

Jane stared at the map for a minute, turned the channel on the TV to a signal-less station, put on a blindfold and sat on the floor. Her nose started to bleed. After a couple minutes, she took off her blindfold, stood up and walked over the the map. She pointed to an area in the middle of the forest.

"How can he be there?" asked Joyce. "What did you see?"

"He's sleeping," said Jane. "But he's not alone. There's a boy with black hair with him."

"That's Mike," said Joyce.

"There were two girls with them," said Jane. "One of them has brown hair, like Will. One of them had blonde hair. They were in some sort of old cabin."

Hopper's eyes widened. "I have to go," he said. "I'll be back soon, Joyce." He hurried outside before Joyce could object. She ran after him.

"Hopper, wait."

"Joyce, go back inside!"

Joyce grabbed his arm. "I know," said said pointedly. "I figured out that you're the friend whose been helping her. Apparently two of my children are at your cabin right now and I'm going with you. And if that blonde girl is who I think she is, they got Sarah from whoever had her."

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Mike gave into the idea that he would end up getting grounded. It was getting later and Lucas' parents were likely to figure out that he and Will weren't there. Mike was going to let Will sleep as long as he needed. He figured it was better than Will passing out on the long trip back.

The four children were startled by the sound of the front door slamming shut. They looked up to see Hopper and Joyce. Will sat up and exchanged an anxious look with Mike.

"Looks like you've broken two of the three 'don't be stupid rules, El," said Hopper. His eyes fell on Sarah. She had never seen her father with a beard before, but recognized him. She stared at her feet. Hopper quickly crossed the room and pulled her into a tight hug. "I'm so sorry," Hopper sobbed. "I thought you were dead and those people took you!"

Sarah had a vision of her father getting drunk and taking lots of pills. She tensed up.

"I'm sorry, this must be so awkward," said Hopper as he released her.

"Where's Mom?"

"She's in Indianapolis," said Hopper. "She and I, things didn't work out."

"Because you were drunk?"

"Yeah, it was mostly my fault."

Joyce had pulled both Will and Eleven into a tight embrace while Mike stood back awkwardly. He had no desire to attract the attention of either adult.

"Did you two plan this little rescue together?" asked Joyce.

"We had to," said Will. "We couldn't let Sarah stay in that place any longer."

"What were you thinking?" asked Hopper as he released Sarah and walked over to them. "What if you'd been caught?"

"We were careful," said Will. "El checked the room for cameras before I opened the portal and we chose a place where the portal wouldn't be caught on camera and I used invisibility so El could disable the camera. We even opened a vent to make it look like that was how Sarah escaped."

Hopper began to rub his eyes and ran his hand down his face. "So let me get this straight: you used two powers that made you sick enough to be in the hospital for a week last fall-"

"I was sick because of the Upside Down," Will protested

"And you risked being seen by the bad people," Hopper continued.

"Nobody saw us!" said Eleven.

"I told you not to put yourself in, El. Now you've gone and dragged your brother into this. What do you think it would have done to your mother if you'd both been caught?"

"You knew all this time they could help me and didn't let them?" asked Sarah. Hopper was at a loss for words. Sarah ran to the bedroom and slammed the door shut. Hopper glanced at Joyce and followed her.

"We need to take you to the lab to get you checked out," said Joyce to Will.

"What? No! I'm fine, Mom," Will protested.

"Will, I could feel your pulse while I was hugging you. This is non negotiable."

Sarah had thrown herself on Eleven's bed and had her face buried in the pillows. Hopper carefully perched on the edge of the bed.

"I'll have to pick up a second bed for this room. I'm sure El will be happy to have some company though."

"So I'm stuck here now?" asked Sarah.

"This is the safest place for you," said Hopper.

"Why wouldn't you let Will and El help find me?" asked Sarah.

"I didn't want to use them or have them put themselves in danger," said Hopper. "But when I found out you were still alive last fall, I started trying to find you."

"How long are El and I stuck here?"

"I don't know," said Hopper. "We're trying to find and stop the people who took you and the other children. I'm working with some people, but I'm not entirely sure I can trust them. I know I'm going to do everything in my power to keep you, Will, Eleven, and Jane safe."

"Jane?"

"She's another test subject who escaped. I just met her this afternoon."

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Dr. Owens turned off the camera and other recording equipment after he finished running the tests of Will. They had given the cover story that Will had been trying to see how long he could stay invisible in case of of Brenner's people tried to kidnap him.

"Can I talk to you alone for a minute?" Dr. Owens asked Hopper.

"Anything you say to me, you can say in front of them?" said Hopper as he indicated Joyce, Will, and Mike.

"Alright, we intercepted some morse code this afternoon. It looks like some tech company had your daughter."

"Had?" asked Hopper.

"Yes, apparently, she escaped. I've got some people looking for her near Cleveland and we're hoping to find her before they do."

"Are you sure?" asked Hopper.

"Pretty darn," said Dr. Owens. "There's something else."

"What's that?"

"Someone's been taking out Brenner's people."